

Colonial Sublime:  
Infrastructure, Landscape, and Traveling Cinemas in Korea, 1898-1926

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by

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## ABSTRACT

### Colonial Sublime: Infrastructure, Landscape, and Traveling Cinemas in Korea, 1898-1926

Sejung Ahn

This dissertation examines the link between Korea's technological modernity and its earliest cinematic history through the aesthetic lens of the sublime. Cinema was introduced to Korea in conjunction with the expansion of infrastructures under a direct and indirect system of colonial rule. And it immediately served as a technique and technology of national and imperial governance, as a way of forging new political subjects during a tumultuous time of social change. Focusing on primitive representations of film technology, the aesthetic conventions of travel film genres, preliminary forms of state-policy films, chain drama's production of national landscapes, and the influence of colonial urbanism on the building of cinematic networks, this dissertation reconstructs the contested beginning of motion-picture technology in Korea during which the Korean experience of modernity was shaped and defined in negotiation with nation-building and globalization.

In doing so, my approach takes a distinct perspective with recourse to the aesthetics of the colonial sublime. In the first place, as an aesthetic category in origin that refers to the subject's emotions of shock and terror, the sublime is a useful concept to understand the formation of the strangely masochistic spectatorship of early cinema for which sensation and astonishment were so central. With the modification of the adjective

“colonial,” however, the colonial sublime has also lent itself well to an examination of the aestheticization of colonial politics and the colonial politics of aesthetics. By bringing together early cinema studies and studies on colonial modernity in Korea, I show that cinema as visual technology — along with other infrastructural projects — has been constantly aestheticized as a spectacle in the development of cinematic culture in Korea.

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines Korea's earliest cinema history, from 1898 to 1926, illuminating the material conditions upon which this novel visual technology imported from the West was received and transformed to give rise to the embryo of a local entertainment industry. While focusing on early cinema not only as a globally circulating commodity but also as a novel technology, this study reconstructs the contested beginning of motion-picture technology in Korea during which the Korean experience of modernity was shaped and defined through negotiations with nation-building, imperialism, colonialism, and globalization.

Studies on early cinema have mostly focused on the modernity of the new medium itself in relation to changes in perception brought about by its capacity to annihilate space and time in the course of urban transformation.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the introduction of the

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Gunning and Miriam B. Hansen are the two leading scholars representing this tendency of scholarship of early cinema studies that discusses the medium's appeal and reception in relation to the emergence of modernity: Tom Gunning's study highlights the unique mode of presentation of early cinema under the rubric of the cinema of attractions as well as audiences' sensory experiences of modernity. Miriam Hansen relates the medium's reception to the formation of mass culture, following the insights of the Frankfurt School of social theory, Walter Benjamin, in particular. See Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed., Linda Williams, 124-133 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8.3-4 (1986): 63-70, "The Whole World within Reach: Travel Images without Borders," in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, ed., Jeffrey Ruoff, 25-41 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), "The World as Object Lesson: Cinema Audiences, Visual Culture and the St. Louis World's Fair, 1904," *Film History* 6.4 (Winter, 1994): 422-444. Also see Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, eds., Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 332-350, (London: Arnold; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) and "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformation of the Public Sphere," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, eds., Linda Williams, 134-152 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

earliest film technology was part of the profound social, cultural, and political transformations in turn-of-the-century Korea. Together with the coming of modern transportation such as railways, steamships, automobiles, and trolley cars, and electricity, cinema became an emblem of technological modernity. Yet the Korean experience of modernity, including that of cinema, must be distinguished from that of the Anglo-American context due to the overriding mediation of colonialism. By bringing together the incipient phase of film history and various forms of imperial drives that swept the globe at the turn of the twentieth century — capitalistic penetration in the guise of indirect rule, the growth of tourism and ethnographic interests, and Korea's colonial history — this dissertation explores the historicity of the formation of early cinema culture in a non-Western context through the case of Korean cinema in its early period.

The earliest phase of the Korean film history under consideration in this dissertation in which motion-pictures evolved from foreign amusement into a commercialized leisure form came about at a politically crucial and tumultuous moment of modern Korean history — i.e. from the short-lived era of the Great Han Empire (1897-1910) to the initial two decades of Japanese colonial rule. Notwithstanding limitations and drawbacks as an unfruitful reformation pursued under monarchy, and the contentious neglect of this brief transitional period in historical scholarship, the reign of the Great Han Empire was a time of experiments, reforms, and social transformations that pursued a self-propelled path for modernization.<sup>2</sup> At a time of a crisis of sovereignty due to being

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<sup>2</sup> For the transitional period of the Great Han Empire during which Korea was transformed from premodern dynasty to a modern nation-state, despite under monarchy system, see Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires: 1895-1915* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), Bruce Cummings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), and Kyung Moon Hwang, *A Korean History* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2010).

surrounded by imperial powers, it was Kojong, the self-appointed monarch of the Great Han Empire, who initiated all-encompassing reforms from above. At the expense of the long-held policy of seclusion, the King and the reformist elites adopted an open-door policy and sought to actively accommodate Western technology in order to shape a modern Korean nation-state. Western science and technology were almost synonymous with “progress,” and the King himself wanted to be the purveyor of this process. During the era of high imperialism, cinema was introduced to Korea as a cutting-edge visual technology through various foreign encounters with fortune-seekers, travelers, missionaries, as well as representations of foreign locales that depicted the superiority of Western civilization.

Since Japan officially annexed Korea in 1910, the imposition of Japanese colonialism, followed by free trade imperialism of the Western powers, complicated the subsequent development not only of cinematic culture but also of the nation’s modernization in general. Free trade imperialism, or imperialism without colonies, refers to the imperial techniques of western powers that was driven by economic motivations and culminated in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As is well-known, the liberal penetration of Western powers in East Asia was precipitated by gunboat diplomacy, which was followed by the signing of a series of unequal treaties in the name of “free trade and friendship.” As a way of reigning in the remote territories instead of pursuing formal colonies, tactical terminology such “protectorate,” “sphere of influence,” and “concession” or “leasehold” were deployed for a precise purpose. Without bearing the

cost required to govern the local population, Western imperialists could gain exclusive access to raw materials, markets, or naval stations.<sup>3</sup>

The controversial complexities generated from this overlapping between modernization and colonialism have been discussed under the rubric of colonial modernity.<sup>4</sup> Although various facets of modernity initiated during the Great Han Empire continued to emerge in the colonial context, and they were planned, materialized, and mobilized for colonial domination by Japan, the Korean experience of modernity was not a totally coerced process but put into contestation between colonialism and nationalism. The development of cinematic culture was the same. As the emblem of urban modernity, the institutionalization of cinema in Korea has deeply entwined with the unfolding of colonial modernity. Having this geopolitical condition of turn-of-the-century Korea in mind, in this dissertation, I show how the earliest film technology played a significant part in shaping national and imperial identities not only as a form of urban entertainment but also as a vehicle of enlightenment.

Despite the temporal significance of the first two decades of cinematic history in Korea as the origin of the industry, which was more or less contemporaneous with the rest of the world in the reception of motion-picture technology, the period has not been properly examined. The most obtrusive and challenging conundrums have resulted from Korea's "hollow archive" as a former colony, which refers to the lack of filmic texts that

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 11.

<sup>4</sup> As a way of challenging the dominant nationalist paradigm in presenting the history of modern Korea in which a dichotomy between colonial repression and national resistance is at work, a new historical approach aroused to emphasize the interconnected dynamics among colonialism, nationalism, and modernity. For further discussions on colonial modernity in the Korean context, see Gi-wook Shin, and Micheal Robinson, *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Havard University Press, 2001).

survived to the present.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the dearth of research materials that could be applied within early cinema studies in general, however, there is an even more daunting question, which is how to articulate the first twenty years of delay before the first Korean production appeared in 1919.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the first two decades of cinematic history in Korea, during which no native Korean productions existed, but crowds of movie-loving audiences flocked to watch various genres of foreign films, Im Hwa, a famed leftist literary and film critic of colonial Korea, dubbed this period “the stage of mere viewing.”<sup>7</sup> His point was that motion-picture technology was invented by the West and Korean film history began by importing the West’s motion pictures and merely consuming them. Assuming an incommensurable divide between the West and non-West,

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<sup>5</sup> Beginning from the mid-90s, what can be called an “archive fever” has arisen and dominated South Korean film scholarship, due to the opportune repatriation of recently uncovered colonial period films. From abroad, particularly from the former territories of the Japanese empire, several Korean films produced during the Japanese colonial period have been discovered and relocated back to Korea. A watershed moment in the history of South Korean cinema could be demarcated thus as a result of a transnational cooperation between international archives that include Korea, Japan, China (Hong Kong), Russia, the US, England, and even the Netherlands. Out of a wishful assumption that supposedly “lost” early films probably could have survived abroad, having disseminated within the Japanese imperial film culture during the Pacific War, the Korean Film Archive (KOFA) has long been committed to excavating those displaced cultural heritages. Since 1998, when KOFA was first able to locate several Korean films that had been mistakenly classified as Japanese from Russia, China, and Japan, as of 2014, not a small number of early films—including both feature films, newsreels, and actuality footage—could be newly catalogued in South Korea’s national film archive. Before then, the film archive in postcolonial South Korea had been suffering from almost an “emptiness” of resources, as Soyoung Kim, a Korean film scholar, lamented. This “emptiness,” however, has been far from being a blank space devoid of perspectives. The very impossibility to get the picture of this pioneering moment, particularly in the making of a homogeneous narrative as a national cinema, has become gradually replete with obsessions for the origin, to legitimate the clichéd formulation between resistance and submission and thereby appropriate the past experience of colonial domination.

<sup>6</sup> Despite its incomplete form as a hybrid form between theater and cinema, *The Righteous Revenge* (*Ŭrijök k’utu*, dir. Kim Do-san, 1919) has been considered as the first Korean nascent production and the day when it was released was designated as the commemoration day for the Korean Cinema.

<sup>7</sup> Im Hwa is a famed leftist critic in colonial Korea who later argued that modern literature in Korea is nothing but a “transplantation” of the western literature, which became quite controversial even back then. See Im Hwa, “Chosŏn yŏnghwaron (Discourses on the Korean Cinema),” *Chunchu* no.10 (November, 1941): 84.

the epithet coined by him attests to a characteristic of the origin of film history in Korea. Indeed, looking at the typical programming packed with foreign films and the enthusiastic reception of them among Koreans, it is no wonder that scholars are tempted to describe this period as one of “western invasion” or “occupied cinemas.”<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, this stage of mere viewing does not simply imply a stagnant state. Although the traditional entertainment scene in Korea was far from being a lucrative business, and it took even longer for the first indoor performance venues to emerge and for the public screening practice of paid admission to be put in place on a regular basis, newly emergent screenings of motion-pictures were very vibrant and exuberant social venues from the outset. This dissertation aims to understand this pre-production period properly, because it has long been glossed over due to the prevalence of the national cinema paradigm and its production-centered approach.

With regard to this ontological divide that differentiates the origin of cinema in the non-Western context, my approach takes a different perspective with reference to aesthetics. Instead of completely glossing over or deprecating the first two decades as the phase of cinematic occupation, on the one hand, I would like to pay attention to the contested ways in which the reception of cutting-edge representational technology was accompanied, accelerated, and complicated by representations of modern technology *per se*. Indeed, technology has the representational capacity and has been constantly aestheticized as a spectacle in the development of cinematic culture in Korea. On the other hand, focusing on primitive representations of novel technologies, early ethnographies and travel film genres, preliminary forms of state-policy films, chain

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<sup>8</sup> See Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, *Korea's Occupied Cinemas, 1893-1948* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011) for this empiricist research tendency.

drama's discovery of domestic landscape, colonial urbanism, and the building of cinematic networks, this dissertation analyzes the ways in which "the colonial sublime" operated not only as a representational technique of early cinematic repertoires but also as representation of technology in the making of earliest film culture in Korea. Under the rubric of the colonial sublime, Brian Larkin examines how representations of not only media technology but also broader infrastructural projects were mobilized to create emotional responses such as awe and wonder and helped to shape new subjectivities in colonial Nigeria.<sup>9</sup> Following his insights, I show that cinema in Korea also served as a technique and technology of national and imperial governance, as a way of forging new political subjects during a tumultuous time of social change. Before discussing the complexity of the onset of Korean cinematic history, let me begin with introducing the following historic anecdotes that may appear a bit fragmentary, episodic, and seemingly unrelated one another, but which bear witness to certain connections that have long remained invisible.

### **The Arrival of the Motley Crew: An Embedded Origin**

Although uncoordinated, the fortunes and crisscrossing trajectories of the following individuals converged at a crucial moment in Korean history and attest to an even more contentious history of the origin of screening motion pictures in Korea. And their contingent encounters seem to be more than a coincidence to the onset of cinematic culture.

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<sup>9</sup> Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 39.

Episode 1. In 1898, two American businessmen, Henry Collbran (from Denver, Colorado) and Harry Bostwick (from San Francisco, California), built the first streetcar line in Seoul with King Kojong's financial backing. Under the auspices of the King, they also received a concession to electrify Seoul and the King's palace in 1901. After the streetcar was built, however, accidents frequently occurred, costing many lives, which eventually called forth an anti-streetcar campaign among Koreans. To mitigate public anger toward the streetcar (and possibly modern transportation technology *per se*), and to promote the use of it, the businessmen planned to take advantage of the brand-new visual technology that had been circulating around the world. For this purpose, they purchased "an expensive state-of-the-art combined magic lantern and film projector" from James Thomas, a tobacco salesman from North Carolina.<sup>10</sup> Their plan was successful, with thousands of people gathering to see the curious machine less than a month after they launched the night outdoor screening. Encouraged by this success, Collbran and Bostwick decided to start a new venture by turning the magic-lantern venue into a permanent theater, and also set up an amusement department within the company, which was exclusively in charge of screening the magic lantern/film projector and running the merry-go-round. This became one of the earliest film-exhibiting theaters, and the venue itself became the distributional center of the American film industry.

Episode 2. Elias Burton Holmes, a Chicago-based, American travelogue lecturer, visited Seoul in 1901 as part of his transcontinental Siberian railway trip to the Far East.

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<sup>10</sup> The first episode is written based on extensive archival research appearing in *Korea's occupied cinemas*. The presence of a hitherto unknown broker, James Thomas, who sold the film apparatus to Collbran and Bostwick, was first discovered in this monograph. For the role of this tobacco sales person in using film technology for promotional purpose, see Brian Yecies and Ae-kyung Shim, 31-37.



During his stay, a high-ranking official in the royal court of Korea came across his travel footage and introduced him to King Kojong. This event has been purported to be the earliest screening of moving images in Korea, despite its private-ness (using a portable projector designed for a single person). According to the travelogue published later by the traveler, not only the Korean King but also the Crown Prince were so fascinated with this novel technology that he had to leave the projector behind as a gift in exchange for twenty yards of rich green silk and gifts of silver.<sup>11</sup>

Episode 3. A former petty merchant from Nagasaki, Japan, Hayashida Ginjirō (林田金次郎), migrated to Korea for a better life during a turbulent time. Benefiting from the wartime economic boom, he made large profits from transporting munitions during the two consecutive Japanese wars fought over the Korean peninsula, the Sino-Japanese War (1895-1896) and Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). He eventually launched a trading company under his own name. Among his comprehensive business ventures, which included the importation and sales of sundry goods, pawn brokerage, and realty investment, the Hayashida Company was also one of the franchise sales agents of the British American Tobacco Company in Korea beginning at the end of the Russo-Japanese War. Hayashida adopted a marketing strategy which used motion-picture screenings to promote its tobacco sales. For example, ten empty cigarette boxes could be traded in for a movie ticket. Later, to embark on the fast-growing show business, he built one of the first permanent movie theaters named Umigwan Theater, which was exclusively targeted at Korean audiences and not Japanese expatriate communities in Seoul. He continued to

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<sup>11</sup> E. Burton Holmes, *Burton Holmes Travelogues* vol. 10. *Seoul — The Capital of Korea, Japan—The Country, Japan—The Cities* (Chicago: Travelogue Bureau, 1920), 107-108.

draw on this promotional tie-in, using motion pictures to advertise foreign and Japanese merchandise, such as toothpaste, that his company was trading in Japan.<sup>12</sup>

Episode 4. Yi Un, the last Crown Prince of the Great Han Empire and the seventh son of King Kojong, was one of the royal family members first exposed to moving pictures in Korea when the American traveler, lecturer, and photographer E. Burton Holmes was invited to the palace and screened his travel footage for the King. According to the recollection of Holmes, which was included in his published travelogue about this trip to Korea, “the baby prince, youngest son of the Emperor and actual palace tyrant, had been fascinated by the toy and had wept when they attempted to take it from him, falling asleep still gripping it firmly in his chubby hands.”<sup>13</sup> In 1907, when Korea was on the verge of annexation by Japan and King Kojong was succeeded by Yi Un’s elder brother, Sunjong, this ten-year-old boy was appointed as the next Crown Prince and was taken to Japan as a political hostage by Itō Hirobumi, the first Resident-General in Korea. In the face of Korean’s negative public sentiment, Itō Hirobumi, who was well aware of the utility of motion pictures as a tool for propaganda, made films to be screened back in Korea, depicting Yi Un’s everyday life by hiring a cameraman working at the Yoshizawa Company. In Korea, people, including the Queen, mother of the Prince, worried about the safety of this little boy and were relieved by the films. Meanwhile, since his childhood, the Crown Prince himself was very interested in projecting moving images and made this

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<sup>12</sup> This third episode is based on Han Sang Ŏn’s research on the role of Japanese settler businessmen in the earliest development of film industry in Korea. See Han Sang Ŏn, “Hwandong sajin sigi chosŏn yŏnghwa sanŏp yŏngu (A Study on the Motion Picture Industry of Korea from 1897 to 1919),” (Hanyang University, Ph.D dissertation, 2010), 81-88.

<sup>13</sup> Holmes, 106.

a lifetime hobby with a portable camera and projector granted to him by the Japanese emperor in an effort to win the heart of the young boy.<sup>14</sup>

The above episodes bear witness to a conspicuous imperative that was embedded in the beginning of cinematic practice in Korea: the arrival of motley crews, including adventurous western fortune seekers, missionaries, journalists, diplomats, professional travel writers and the early generation of Japanese merchants, officials, and settlers who made pioneering forays into the earliest film technology. Having remained largely unexplored in film scholarship, it was this ragtag band of foreigners who crossed borders in pursuit of profit, adventure, labor, land, creed, or simply a better life and became critical vehicles for circulating technology, goods, capital, and ideas. The trajectories of various individuals in these vignettes lead us to reconsider the role of transnational migration, modern transportation, and international trade networks in helping the new cinema technology to circulate on a global scale and arrive to Korea. Early cinema had an indispensable relation with the spread of colonialism, the institutionalization of modern travel, the building of colonial infrastructure, and the hegemonic expansion of the global manufacturing industries.

Japan's economic motivations, expressed in its practices of new imperialism, was one of the major catalysts that incorporated Korea into a modern world system while putting an end to its long-held isolation policy. Almost equated with the principle of free trade, this informal strategy for imperial powers to acquire new colonies became a

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<sup>14</sup> Regarding Itō Hirobumi's use of motion-picture to record the Korean Crown Prince, see Bok Hwan Mo, "Han'guk yŏnghwa ch'ogi e issōsō ito hirobumi ūi yŏnghwa iyong e kwanhan yŏngu (A study on Itō Hirobumi's Use of Movies in the Early Stage of Korea Film History)" *Yŏnghwa yŏngu* 28 (2006), 251-276.

vehicle in exploring new overseas markets to export their manufactured goods in exchange for raw materials. Emulating their Western predecessors, it was this informal imperialism of Japan that put forward gunboats and opened the ports of Korea for international trade in 1876, which was followed by a series of unequal treaties with other imperial powers. In this process, what was central was the intermediary role that sub-imperialists called “men on the spot” played at various local levels.<sup>15</sup> As Jun Uchida’s extensive study has shown regarding the role of these influential settlers in colonial Korea, these people “operated in these liminal spaces as brokers of empire,” while “bridging the settler and Korean communities, or lobbying for the interest of the peninsula vis-à-vis the metropole.”<sup>16</sup> As I will show, the presence of these Japanese settlers and their pioneering entrepreneurship in Korea, let alone Western fortune seekers, constituted one of the multiple origins of Korean film history.

If seen through the lens of international trade, one can observe that the era-defining technology of motion pictures was readily dominated by profit-seeking initiatives soon after it was invented. Although the incipient stage of motion pictures may appear to be, as Patrick Loughney puts it, “a tale of aesthetic experimentation, technological development, and economic success, it was, upon closer inspection, also a period beset by mini-cycles of boom and bust, copyright piracy and patent infringement, aggressive litigation, competing film and equipment formats, and wide variation in the quality of projected image entertainments.”<sup>17</sup> Oftentimes, it also created a battlefield

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<sup>15</sup> For the role of these men of the spot in the context of Japan and Korea, see Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Loughney, “Movies and Entrepreneurs,” in *American Cinema, 1890-1909: Themes and Variations*, ed., André Gaudreault (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 69.

among many international rivalries, including Thomas Edison's Motion Picture Patent Company and French companies like Pathé, Gaumont, and Méliès. Along with the competition for the profitability of this newly patented film technology, the typical practices of the multinational corporations, such as merger and acquisitions, syndicate and cartel formation, and overseas market expansions, were already prefigured before the ascendance of Hollywood as the world's largest entertainment powerhouse.

Tracing the transnational flows of the state-of-the-art visual technology on a global scale and international migrations casts a new light on our understanding of the origin of cinematic culture in Korea, not from a national but from a world-historical perspective. In terms of world history, various motives not entirely confined to national and colonial dynamics crisscrossed. In this way, early cinema studies also can benefit studies of colonial Korea by complicating the dead-locked discourse of "colonial modernity," where modernity has been ultimately understood as being forged through the interplay between nationalism and colonialism. Paying attention to these economic imperatives that propelled the circulation of early cinema as technology and commodity, this dissertation seeks to reconstruct the transnational origin implicated in the earliest motion-picture exhibitions in Korea.

### **The Colonial Sublime: The Aesthetics of Early Cinema, Primitive Culture, and Technology**

As a way of challenging the disciplinary boundaries between two discrete forms of scholarship — early cinema studies and colonial modernity studies — I have recourse to the oft-discussed relation between aesthetics and politics through the lens of the colonial sublime. As an aesthetic category in origin, the sublime refers to an emotional state of

mind related to pain and terror, particularly when provoked by overwhelming confrontation with anything great, infinite, and obscure. With the modification of an adjective of colonial, however, the colonial sublime has lent itself very well to an examination of the aestheticization of colonial politics and the colonial politics of aesthetics. On the one hand, the colonial sublime is a notion that can present violent yet spectacular experiences of colonialism. As Brian Larkin remarks, colonialism would be best presented as “a sublime force, limitless in nature, with huge powers at its disposal to control the natural and social world” to the eyes of colonial subjects.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, it is also useful to understand the sensational aesthetics of early cinema dubbed as the “cinema of attractions,” especially with regard to the formation of the strangely masochistic spectatorship of early cinema to which sensation and astonishment were so central.<sup>19</sup> These are two directions for which I will rely on the concept of the colonial sublime in this dissertation. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to briefly recapitulate the concept’s historical development in relation to the emergence of aesthetics as a discipline in the eighteenth century.

Although the sublime traces back to the antiquity times in Longinus’s explanation on the elevating capacity of oratory and fine writing, it was only in the eighteenth century when Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant revived the concept as part of vigorous exploration on human sentiments. The most salient definition of the sublime can be found

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<sup>18</sup> Larkin, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Coined by Tom Gunning, “the cinema of attractions” refers to early cinematic aesthetics prior to the coming of narrative cinema. Relying on presentational mode of exhibition, such as actor’s look at the camera, which had become a taboo in the representational mode of exhibition of narrative cinemas, it is an aesthetics that aimed to draw viewer’s self-conscious curiosity to the act of voyeuristic viewing itself. See Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde.”

in Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort of terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling... When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight and are simply terrible, but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we everyday experience.<sup>20</sup>

According to Burke, the sublime refers to a sensory shock we experience from an encounter with any kind of terrifying object. Yet it is the strongest emotion that can be potentially transformed into a pleasure under certain conditions – that is “at certain distance.” In this sense, the sublime is a “negative pleasure” that can be experienced only after the initial fear and terror are overcome by securing a certain distance. After witnessing a deadly flood in Dublin, Burke mentioned, “It gives me pleasure to see nature in these great though terrible scenes. It fills the mind with grand ideas and turns the soul in upon itself.”<sup>21</sup> In this way, as a source of great inspiration, Burke's sublime is attributed to natural phenomena.

In a similar fashion, Kant elaborated on the concept through differentiating two kinds of the subcategories of the sublime in the *Critique of Judgement* – the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime. While the former concerns the absolute greatness or vastness, the latter kind of the sublime arises when a subject can contemplate “who is

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<sup>20</sup> See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* [1757], ed., J. T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 39-40. Recited from Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Edmund Burke to Richard Shackleton, January 25, 1744/45, Recited from Luke Gibbons, 3.

safe from immediate danger” when confronted terrifying natural force.<sup>22</sup> Regarding the experience of the dynamic sublime, he mentioned the role of powerful nature as follows:

Bold, overhanging and as it were threatening cliffs, masses of cloud piled up in the heavens and alive with lightning and peals of thunder, volcanoes in all their destructive force, hurricanes bearing destruction in their path, the boundless ocean in the fury of a tempest, the lofty waterfall of a mighty river; these by their tremendous force dwarf our power of resistance into insignificance. But we are all the more attracted by their aspect the more fearful they are, when we are in a state of security; and we at once pronounce them sublime, because they call out unwonted strength of soul and reveal in us a power of resistance of an entirely different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent omnipotence of nature.<sup>23</sup>

Just as Burke did, Kant also attributed the sublime quality to “the omnipotence of nature” and emphasized the subject’s safe state with a distance “from immediate danger.” Despite this commonality between the two philosophers in assuming certain distance for contemplation, Kant made a shift in understanding the sublime. According to him, what makes the experience of sublimity possible are not attributes of nature alone but the subject’s reason through which the subject comes to realize that nature’s threat is only illusionary in so far as the safety of the subject is spatially secured. In this sense, a sort of pleasure arises at the moment when the subject becomes aware of his perceptual superiority over nature.

With recourse to the eighteenth-century discourses of the sublime in which human perception interacts with natural force as such, I seek to reconsider early cinematic aesthetics that have been discussed under the rubric of the so-called “train effect.” The sensational shock that would have captivated the first audience at Paris Grand Café has been dubbed the “train effect,” and has been reproduced to describe the initial shock and

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<sup>22</sup> David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Kant in David Nye, 7.



awe generated from the visual technology within different historical contexts. To understand the mechanism by which the novel technology of cinema ascended as the most privileged form of modern entertainment, therefore, one must ask the following questions: What made the seemingly panicked experience of the viewers before moving images of an on-rushing train on the screen a pleasurable one? What was so attractive about the exotic foreign images of travel films, or the warfare and natural disasters—including fire, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions covered in reportage-like newsreel footage—or other sensational phenomena such as executions or various pageant ceremonies that constituted the important genres of early cinema’s programming? And what kind of role did colonialism play in this spontaneous psychological mechanism of the viewers? Following Karatani Kojin’s insightful reading of Kant, I contend that an answer for these questions may be found from Kant’s assertion of the superiority of human judgment that can dialectically transform the initial displeasure into a delight.<sup>24</sup>

When it comes to real politics replete with imperial invasions and colonial dominations, however, “an aesthetic stance” arising from the European Enlightenment, according to Karatani, tended to be used to objectify non-Western worlds as other.<sup>25</sup> Kant’s own understanding on the Oriental nations was no exception to this typicality of European representations of the time.<sup>26</sup> And Karatani went further to argue that this “aestheticist way of appreciating and respecting the other” and negligence of their reality are the two sides of the same coin, which is not contradictory at all.<sup>27</sup> Along with

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<sup>24</sup> Kojin Karatani and Sabu Kosho, “Uses of Aesthetics: After Orientalism,” *boundary 2*. 2-25 (1998), 145-160.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 147. See footnote 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

the increased popularity of World Exhibitions since the nineteenth century, which catered to the culturally refined tastes of the emerging middle class in the West, films with ethnographic themes and travel genres proliferated. As seen in the above vignettes, one of the first film exhibitions was made possible with the arrival of the Western travelers who set foot in turn-of-the-century Korea precisely for this purpose. In addition to reexamining sensations associated with early cinematic aesthetics, the colonial sublime also serves as a useful tool to analyze the primitive representations of turn-of-the-century Korea captured through the eyes of Westerners. The colonial sublime, in this context, refers to the scopic hegemony of the West to aesthetically grasp the least represented cultures on the other side of the world.

At the same time, the sublime may be the aesthetic responses to modern technology itself that was often accompanied by wars, coercion, or disasters at a time of imperialism and colonialism. While the sublime — to Burke and Kant at least — was generated by the spectacle of nature in the romantic period, in the early twentieth century, with the rise of material culture and the technological achievements, there was a significant shift; instead of natural wonder, the sublime took on a different meaning as it began to be associated with man-made objects. Not only as a technique that improved modern life but also as a social construction, technology replaced the place of terrifying natural forces as the object of awe, wonder, and astonishment. In a sense, the new sort of shock embodied by technology was even more reinforcing to which the omnipotent power of the natural world is controlled and subordinated. Contrary to the natural sublime by which human limitations are dialectically endorsed, as Thomas Weiskel pointed out, what made the technological sublime possible is the human being's triumphant mastery over natural

forces.<sup>28</sup> In that those awe-inspiring steamboats, railroads, bridges, and dams were the work of humankind, “the sublime object itself was a manifestation of reason.”<sup>29</sup> In this dissertation, I locate early cinema not only as a medium that can represent technological wonders of modernity but also as technology *per se* that is capable of producing the sense of the sublime. In addition to analyzing how the early cinematic repertoires and their representations of foreign perspectives, wars, or transportation were received, I also examine the thrill of the first encounters with the visual technology itself. If what can be called the train effect did exist in Korea, I contend that it should be understood as an experience of the sublime generated through an aesthetic response to modern visual technology itself.

As David Nye has pointed out in his attempt to trace the pivotal role of the technological sublime in forging the American identity, the railways, the erection of bridges, skyscrapers, and factories, electricity, and even the world exhibitions are the new objects that played a central part in creating a collective experience of modernity in the course of the America’s nation-building.<sup>30</sup> The mode of governance implicated in this kind of techno-politics — in the sense of showcasing technology for political purposes — were even more reinforced in the complicated relationship between technology and colonial rule. With regard to these techniques of governance in which technological advancement is mobilized to “represent an overwhelming sense of grandeur and awe in the service of colonial powers” in colonial Nigeria, Brian Larkin remarked that “[t]he colonial sublime was an effort, by colonists, to use technology as part of political rule and

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 44.

<sup>29</sup> Nye, 60.

<sup>30</sup> See David Nye’s Introduction.

as evidence of the supremacy of the European technological civilization.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, the sense of the sublime is deliberately produced in the attempt to turn technology into a political spectacle in the colonial context, to showcase the superiority of colonists and to instill feelings of submission among the colonized. Although it intends to manifest a split between colonizer and colonized, shared rituals of parades and opening ceremonies were the concrete forms that materialized these efforts.<sup>32</sup> Both as a political ritual and a visual spectacle, grand openings of infrastructural projects are “moments where the public display of colonial authority is made manifest.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, the technological sublime, or the sublime use of technology, is a positive experience that celebrates the triumph of human reason, rather than signifying a confrontation with its limitations. Moreover, when it was experienced as a collective, “the sublime served as an element for social cohesion.”<sup>34</sup> Especially in the multicultural context of the US nation-building period, the sublime could create a certain sense of solidarity in a way that “no single religion could perform that function.”<sup>35</sup> As I will show in what follows, this explains why not only colonists but also nationalists strove to exploit the representational logic and assimilationist possibilities of technology in turn-of-the-century Korea.

### **Infrastructures of Enlightenment: Early Cinema, Travel and the Root of Culture Film**

The history of early cinema in Korea was caught between two contrasting motivations: one related to the medium’s commercial potential as a new visual

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<sup>31</sup> Larkin, 39.

<sup>32</sup> Nye, 65-67.

<sup>33</sup> Larkin, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Nye, xiv.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., xiv.

technology that gave rise to the most popular form of mass entertainment and the other being the perception of the medium as a pedagogical vehicle for civilizing people. While the former has been discussed in relation to the medium's modernity and its correlation with the rise of urbanization, the latter, by contrast, has been considered in conjunction with the enlightenment project, whose mode of address is political and pedagogical rather than entertaining. For example, Yi Sun Jin, a Korean film scholar, pointed out that these two contrasting tendencies are not entirely incompatible and often manifest themselves in a reciprocal way.<sup>36</sup> She went further to mention that vis-à-vis its commercial cousin's development into a viable business, the tradition of non-commercial, pedagogical films persisted throughout the colonial period (and even to the present day) in the form of travelogues, newsreels, and instructional films on public issues such as public hygiene, health, agriculture.<sup>37</sup> And the culmination of this tendency is the proliferation of propaganda films in the 1930s and 1940s during the time of total mobilization in the Japanese empire. Having the medium's inherent tension in mind, this dissertation examines the trajectory through which cinema-viewing came to be institutionalized as social practice, as an important part of urbanization, enlightenment, and colonialism all at the same time.

In tracing cinema's pivotal role as a vehicle for education and enlightenment in turn-of-the-century Korea, I draw on infrastructure as an analytical concept through which the history of early cinema can be understood from a different perspective. According to Brian Larkin, "[i]nfrastructures are the material forms that allow for

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<sup>36</sup> Yi Sun Jin, "Chosŏn musŏngyonghwa ūi hwalgŭksŏng gwa kongyŏnsŏng e taehan yŏngu (A Study on "Action" and "Performance" modes in Chosŏn's Silent Film)," (Chŭngang University, Ph.D. dissertation, 2008), 26.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

exchange over space, creating the channels that connect urban places in wider regional, national and transnational networks.”<sup>38</sup> Given that cinema was introduced to Korea thanks to the increased mobility and circulation of commodities, people, and ideas on a global scale, as seen in the above episodes, paying attention to infrastructure as a physical network enables us to reconsider the transnational origin of cinematic culture in relation to the material connections that linked disparate places and people together. Had it not been for this mediating capacity of infrastructure — the rise of modern transportation that facilitated international trade and migration — the arrival of cutting-edge technology to Korea would not have been possible in the first place.

As elsewhere, the emergence of cinematic culture was an undoubtedly urban phenomenon in Korea through which conceptions of space and time were drastically reconfigured. Looking into the inseparable relation between infrastructure and early cinema opened up new avenues of inquiry in light of cinema’s modernity. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch and Lynn Kirby have shown, for example, the railway systems rehearsed an optical experience similar to that of cinematic perception.<sup>39</sup> Historically, the introduction of film technology to Korea coincides with the coming of modern infrastructures, including railways, waterworks, and electricity. In this vein, “the passenger-spectators,” a neologism coined to refer to the parallelism between the two emblematic modern

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<sup>38</sup> Larkin, 5.

<sup>39</sup> See Lynn Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997) and Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014).

experiences of cinema and modern transportation, was more than a mere metaphor at this specific socio-historical juncture in Korea.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to being a physical network, infrastructures can be understood as a political spectacle. Infrastructure's representational capacity brings our attention to a complex working of techno-politics deployed during the Great Han Empire. Technology is presented as a celebratory spectacle at a time of a crisis of sovereignty. As a way of manifesting his monarchical authority, various representational tactics were explored to present King Kojong and the royal court as the embodiment of modern progress.<sup>41</sup> For this purpose, as in the well-known formulation of Eric Hobsbawm, much effort was put into "invented traditions," including national ceremonies and public monuments.<sup>42</sup>

The pageantry of the royal procession and various opening ceremonies were staple examples of Kojong's politics of representation. Having been known to be the ostensible motive for the construction of the first streetcar in Seoul, the King's processions functioned as a public spectacle as well. As a way of making the presence of the royal court more visible, the Emperor frequented ceremonial processions to the tomb of his deceased Queen located in Hongnŭng. As tens of thousands of people lined the streets on his way to witness this extraordinary event, the King's presence was an unprecedented

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<sup>40</sup> Regarding the "spectator as passenger" convention, see Charles Musser, *Before Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 260-265.

<sup>41</sup> Although the monarch declared the birth of the Great Han Empire with his coronation as emperor in 1897, however, the legitimacy of the short-lived Korean empire had hardly been secured until its complete demise in 1910.

<sup>42</sup> For the role of tradition made up as part of showcasing authenticity during the course of nation-building, Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger Ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: The University of Cambridge Press, 1988).

opportunity to create a sense of meaningful contact between the throne and its subjects.<sup>43</sup> In this process, what was central was to appropriate the power of technology in a spectacular way. Just like the grand openings of infrastructural projects like the streetcar and electric lights, the staging of the royal procession with recourse to the mobility of modern transportation provides an extraordinary example of the monarch's deployment of the "technological sublime." Not only as a visual spectacle but also as a political ritual, the grand openings were used to foreground the technological achievements of the monarch.<sup>44</sup>

If seen through the lens of infrastructure, early cinema itself functioned as an infrastructural network. The expansion of infrastructures helped to create a sense of spatial consolidation, thus contributing to the construction of the nation as an imagined community. Reminiscent of the role of print capitalism in the seminal work of Benedict Anderson, the erection of communication and transportation networks, including cinema, played a key part in arousing a unified sense of belonging called nationalism.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, by connecting disparate territories and spreading ideas, infrastructure enabled Korea's integration with the wider global economic, cultural, and media systems. I contend that cinema performed a similar function in its earliest days in Korea. Along with underwater cables and telegraph lines, railways, bridges, print publication, and newspapers, cinema became the material condition through which new modern subjects could take shape.

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<sup>43</sup> For the politics of the Korean king's progress in semi-colonial Korea see Christine Kim, "Politics and Pageantry in Protectorate Korea (1905-10): The Imperial Progresses of Sunjong," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 68-3 (2009).

<sup>44</sup> Larkin, 18-19.

<sup>45</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).



While drawing on the notion of infrastructure to illuminate the earliest cinematic culture in Korea, what should also be discussed is how travel and representations of travel served as a vehicle for enlightenment. Given that it was the time when civilization and enlightenment were the most urgent task to be accomplished and the *zeitgeist* of the nation, the first decade of cinematic culture in Korea was, in fact, dominated by nonfiction films with educational themes ranging from improving hygiene to encouraging savings, rather than by narrative films. Among others, as Yi Sun Jin points out, war newsreels and actuality films provided educational opportunities to learn the logic of social Darwinism that justified colonial domination of one nation over another.<sup>46</sup> While referencing various discourses concerning the newly-expanded geographical knowledge of the other side of the world, these actuality films served as the most efficient window to the world through which audiences in Korea were connected to the most up-to-date events of the modern world system.

In addition to war actualities, travel films played an integral part in the early phase of Korean film history. As marvelous spectacles that piqued people's geographical curiosity for the world and travel, various films with travel themes also helped to discover new conceptions of landscape. As I will discuss in the following chapters, it did not take very long for those who used to stare back at the Westerner's camera to begin to form a spectatorship, to consume the Western-made travelogues on a regular basis, and to use the technology for their own representation. Not only as a "rational amusement" for enlightenment, but also as a powerful vehicle for national or imperial propaganda, travel films in Korea intersected with colonial politics, technology, knowledge, and visibility

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<sup>46</sup> Yi, 39-54.

during the politically turbulent period from the turn of the century to the colonial period. In this process of technology transfer, a variety of locales and scenery in Korea were newly constructed, domesticated, and conjured up as national or imperial landscapes. While attributing the root of “culture films” to the prevalence of non-fiction actualities — and travel films, in particular — during cinema’s formative days in Korea, this dissertation casts new light on the pedagogic and didactic mode of early cinema that manifested in the reception of the earliest film technology in Korea.

## **Chapter Outline**

The first chapter traces the exogenous origin of the Korean cinema by examining the pre-cinematic period prior to the medium’s institutionalization as modern mass culture. To understand the beginning of cinematic culture in Korea as a transnational process of technological transfer and its commodification, I reconstruct the material routes and itineraries through which the state-of-the-art visual technology invented in the West actually traveled to Korea. As a Western import [*pangnaep’um*], cinema was introduced to Korea by various historical agents at home and abroad. In this process of transference, the role of sub-imperialists merits attention in exploring the transnationality embedded with the beginning of the Korean cinematic history. Paying attention to the intermediary role of these “men on the spot,” I contend that it was the building of the transglobal trade network, with its incentive of economic exploitation, that primarily facilitated the dissemination of the earliest film technology.

In so doing, I also reconsider the “uncanny and agitating power,” as Tom Gunning put it, that the earliest film projections exerted on audiences under the emblem

of the “train effect” in a specific historical context of colonialism.<sup>47</sup> Regarding the initial terror of the first audiences depicted in the widely-believed myth of being confronted by the threatening cinematic image of an approaching train, Tom Gunning rather figuratively commented that these earliest audiences were reduced “to a state usually attributed to savages in their primal encounter with the advanced technology of Western colonialists.”<sup>48</sup> In turn-of-the-century Korea, however, the so-called “train effect” might have taken on a slightly different set of connotations. Paying attention to both similarities and dissimilarities, how can we articulate the wonder and awe immanent not only with the dialectic formation of early cinematic spectatorship, as in the explanation of Tom Gunning, but also with the transfer of technology itself in this pre-colonial context in Korea where modernity had to be mediated and exogenous in its origin? Along with other technological thrills accelerated by the comprehensive infrastructural projects in implementing modern transportation, the communication network, print, and even mining industry, this chapter examines the ambivalent implication of the surprise, wonder, and awe of the earliest audiences’ reception in Korea through the lens of the technological sublime.

In the second chapter, I examine two travel films depicting turn-of-the-century Korea with a focus on their ideological motivations and stylistic conventions. As a visual technology annihilating time and space, cinema arose at the intersection of the industrialization of modern transportation and growing interest in geographic and ethnographic knowledge on the other side of the globe. Paying attention to the historical

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<sup>47</sup> Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator,” in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed., Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 116.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-115.

complicity between tourism, transportation, and colonialism for “making the world available in the form of a spectacle,” this chapter examines early cinema as a “machine for travel”— either actual or virtual — and traces how the earliest film technology contributed to the discovery of landscapes as an epistemic system of representation.<sup>49</sup> While the first chapter examines the intersection between the penetration of capitalistic modernity and the coming of pre-cinematic culture through the lens of the technological sublime, this chapter looks at how modern travel and the representation of travel mobilized motion-picture technology and helped to spread the Western mode of vision and geographic knowledge about the world. I will show that early travelogues were developed according to a particular set of aesthetic norms, somewhere between the picturesque and the sublime.

While the second chapter shows that the power of the Western mode of vision lay in its technological superiority that could visually fix the rest of the world in a particular order, reflecting the unevenness of capitalist development all over the globe, the third chapter examines it the other way around: what would happen if non-Westerners also began to exert the same visual power for their own representation? As a powerful vehicle for change, the circulation and production of travel films came to be easily conjoined with competing political agendas in a non-Western context. Once the Western technology came to be available for use for their own representation, travel representations became an effective tool for enlightenment through which new forms of subjectivity could take shape accordingly. By analyzing how various travel motives were utilized in the

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<sup>49</sup> Tom Gunning, “The Whole World within Reach: Travel Images without Borders,” 29.

discourses of an enlightenment thinker, Ch'oe Nam-sŏn, the proto-type of colonial propaganda, and a hybrid genre called chain drama (*yŏnsoegŭk*) that inserted cinematic elements for theatrical performances, this chapter discusses the unique way in which technology was aestheticized as a spectacle. In other words, non-Westerners who were once the passive objects of the cinematic spectacle became active subjects themselves who began to discover, appropriate, and even manufacture domestic landscapes from an aesthetic distance.

The last chapter examines the emergence and development of movie theaters in Korea as materialistic infrastructure for the institutionalization of cinema-viewing. In conjunction with the formation of a colonial public sphere, the emergence of movie theaters was propelled, transformed, and complicated amid the ongoing urbanization under Japan's colonial rule. For the two decades after the inception of film technology, the beginning of movie theater construction was connected to the social, political, and cultural transformation of urban Seoul and its later development, which facilitated the transition of the motion-picture from novel amusement imported from the West to local enterprise. In light of this inseparable relation between infrastructure and the emergence of cinema-going as both commercial and social practice, the first section of this chapter historicizes the appearance of modern theaters as an infrastructure of both entertainment and enlightenment for the emergent mass public.

Paying attention to how modern infrastructures were planned, materialized, and mobilized as a political form of spectacle, this chapter also depicts how colonial city planning created and reinforced ethnically segregated spatial patterns of film spectatorship from an urban sociological perspective. Contrary to Japanese official's dual

intents to showcase their modernizing techniques through improving the cityscape of Seoul while also promoting spatial assimilation, Japan's techno-politics in implementing infrastructure resulted in uneven development rather than the integration of ethnically dichotomous social spaces. As a result, movie theaters in colonial Korea transformed from ethnically hybrid spaces to ethnically segregated spaces, which gave rise to segregated film spectatorship. Tracing this trajectory from desegregation to resegregation, I show that movie theaters, as infrastructure, could serve both consolidation and fragmentation under the colonial social hierarchy. Extending Miriam Hansen's insights in light of colonial spectatorship in Korea, the last section of this chapter examines the ways in which cinema served "as a catalyst for new forms of community and solidarity," thus constituting a colonial public sphere.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.,147.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Technologies of the Sublime: Gold Mining, Railroads, Electricity, Tobacco, and the Origin of Cinema in Korea

Until 1900, the few people in the West who had ever heard of Korea or could locate it on a map might have known one “historic” fact about it: that it had gold.  
Donald N. Clark, *Living Dangerously in Korea: The Western Experience 1900-1950*

What has filled the public with wonder, awe, and even terror?  
David Nye, *American Technological Sublime*

This chapter traces an exogenous origin of the Korean cinema by examining the pre-cinematic period prior to the medium’s institutionalization as modern mass culture. To understand the origin of pre-cinematic culture in Korea as a transnational process of technological transfer and its commodification, I reconstruct the material routes and itineraries through which the state-of-the-art visual technology invented in the west actually traveled to arrive to Korea.

Purportedly, the first publicly organized commercial screenings in Korea trace back to 1903. According to *Hwasŏng Sinmun*, between 8:00 and 10:00 p.m. every night except for Sundays or rainy days, the earliest motion-picture footage depicting “striking and lively scenery of various cities in the United States, Europe and even *Korea*” was to be screened with an admission charge of three *chŏn*.<sup>51</sup> The historic venue of this nighttime screening was the Seoul Electric Company’s warehouse located near the East Gate (*Tongdaemun*) at the end of the main thoroughfare in Seoul.

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<sup>51</sup> *Hwasŏng Sinmun*, June 23, 1903.

Despite its terseness, the advertisement bears witness to how Korea was contemporaneous with the rest of the world in catching up with the state-of-the-art film technology that had been readily commodified by various profit-seeking initiatives soon after it was invented. In the first place, the advertisement hints at the beginning of modern spectatorship in Korea. What can be first inferred from the advertisement is that these earliest screenings in Korea were commercial events that required audiences to pay certain amounts of money for admission. Given the rigid status system upheld throughout Korea's long dynastic history, this flat rate fare system may even appear revolutionary, as it attests to the emergence of a mass public who would not have been discriminated by gender, age, or social status. In addition, the advertisement also enables us to glimpse the repertoires shown to these earliest spectators in Korea. Due to the lack or unavailability of film texts from the time — a common conundrum in early cinema studies — it is almost impossible to locate detailed information about the playlist in the advertisement. What is notable, however, is that not only foreign landscapes of the greatest cities in the world but also domestic scenery would have interested the earliest film spectators in Korea, who flocked to the screening venue every night and made these unprecedented nocturnal events a huge success. There is no doubt that this newspaper advertisement serves as a starting point in many ways for any Korean film historian wanting to testify to the beginning of early cinematic history in Korea.

Nevertheless, one crucial question remains that fails to receive attention from the advertisement: Why was it that the first electric company in Korea, established by American settler businessmen, screened these films in the first place? The sponsorship of the Seoul Electric Company, which connects the advent of cinema with broader processes



of modernization in this critical juncture in modern Korean history, has been left mostly unexplored in both film history and studies of the modern history of Korea, but it is too conspicuous to be glossed over. This chapter begins this exploration by looking at the contingent connections between the first electric company in Korea, the multidimensional relevance of the two American settler businessmen who were *de facto* proprietors of the Seoul Electric Company, and the arrival of cinema to Korea.

As a Western import (*pangnaep'um*), cinema was introduced to Korea by various historical agents at home and abroad. Although uncoordinated, a ragtag band of foreigners who crossed borders in pursuit of profit, adventure, labor, land, creed, or simply a better life became the critical vehicle in this process of transference. Paying attention to the intermediary role of these “men on the spot,” I contend that the economically exploitative incentives manifest in the building of the early twentieth century’s transglobal trade networks facilitated the dissemination of the earliest film technology. As Jun Uchida has shown, the men on the spot refer to a group of sub-imperialists, “including merchants, settlers, missionaries, and diplomats, who provided the initial impetus for imperial expansion.”<sup>52</sup> As “brokers of empire,” as she put it, this motley group of people played a central role both in public and civilian arenas and influenced on the imperial process bridging the empire with the Korean communities.<sup>53</sup> How were the first streetcars, railroads, and urban sanitary waterworks implemented in Seoul? What does the electrifying of the King’s Palace have to do with the advent of the era-defining technology of capturing and projecting moving images? What does the newly patented technology of projecting moving images imported from the West have in

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<sup>52</sup> Uchida, 26.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

common with the global cigarette industry that dominated colonial markets, particularly in Asia? Why did an American businessman, who had adeptly pursued exclusive rights to ventures, including coal mining, under the auspices of a US diplomat, become involved with commercial film screenings? These are questions that will be discussed in this chapter, in order to examine the indispensable relation of early cinema with the spread of colonialism, the building of colonial infrastructures, and the hegemonic expansion of global manufacturing industries.

In doing so, I also reconsider the “uncanny and agitating power” the earliest film projections exerted on audiences under the emblem of the “train effect” in the specific historical context of colonialism.<sup>54</sup> Regarding the initial terror of the first audience confronted with the threatening image of an oncoming train, Tom Gunning figuratively commented that these earliest audiences were reduced “to a state usually attributed to savages in their primal encounter with the advanced technology of Western colonialists.”<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, under the rubric of “cinema of attractions,” what Gunning ultimately attempts at is to reverse a tradition assumption on childlike credulity of these earliest audiences. While challenging the long-held myth on the primal audience reaction

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<sup>54</sup> Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator,” 116. It is Yuri Tsivian who labeled the founding myth on the first audience’s panicking response vis-à-vis the projection of a running train in Lumière brother’s first film as the train-effects. The myth reconstructs the first screening at Grand Café as follows: when the image of a train approached, the audience was so panicked and ran away from the screening room. Whether it was real or not is not identifiable. However, as many scholars on early cinema, including Christian Metz, Tom Gunning and Stephen Bottomore, have examined, it came to refer to sensory power of early cinema in general. See Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception*. Translated by Alan Bodger and Ed., Richard Taylor (Chicago, IL: The Chicago University Press, 1998), Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psycho Analysis and the Cinema*, tr., Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1982), Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator,” and Stephen Bottomore, “The Panicking Audience?: Early Cinema and the Train Effect,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 19-2, (1999), 177-216.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

to the motion of mechanized images, he asserts that it is the very illusionary power of the cinematic apparatus itself, rather than audiences' misconception of the image as reality that explains the thrill of this first encounter.<sup>56</sup> Placed between credulity and incredulity, the key to understand the oxymoronic pleasure of early cinematic spectatorship, according to Gunning, lies in audiences' spontaneous awareness of the power of the new visual technology.<sup>57</sup> In this sense, contrary to the primitive one, "it was the encounter with the modernity."<sup>58</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, in a Korea on the verge of falling prey to colonial powers, however, the so-called "train effect" might have taken on a slightly different set of connotations. Although the influx of Western technology was equated with progress, because urbanization had not yet begun and the early material culture was just emerging, we must try to account for the non-linear aesthetic experience of these early visual encounters of the first Koreans exposed to overwhelming motion picture images at the American-owned electric company's warehouse. How can we articulate the wonder and awe immanent in the transfer of Western technologies in this pre-colonial context, where modernity was exogenous in origin, therefore, had to be mediated? Along with other technological thrills accelerated by comprehensive infrastructural projects in implementing modern transportation, communication networks, printing, and the mining industry, this chapter complicates the ambivalent implications of the surprise, wonder, and awe felt by audiences in the earliest reception of the film in Korea through the lens of the sublime.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 129.

## **Primitive Accumulation: Indirect Rule, Infrastructures, and the Exogenous Origin of Cinema**

The arrival of cinema in Korea was propelled by the “informal” strategies of an “imperialism of free trade,” which can be characterized by the exploration of new markets for manufactured goods, the maintenance of privileged access to resources, and the protection of domestic markets on a global scale without acquiring real colonies.<sup>59</sup> To trace this unexplored assertion of how the liberal impetus for global marketization helped to spread the earliest visual technologies worldwide, it is necessary to start by looking at the contentious entrepreneurship of US businessmen in Korea, with a focus on the multi-directional operations of the Seoul Electric Company. This is a crucial problem to examine, attesting to the complicity between colonialism and early cinema in Korea.

The Seoul Electric Company was established in 1898 by two American businessmen, Henry Collbran, and Harry Bostwick, who were “typical of a cohort of Western entrepreneurs operating in Asia.”<sup>60</sup> Similar to the pioneering of America’s western frontiers, what brought Collbran and Bostwick to Korea was gold and the railroad. Although on a personal level, they were motivated by self-interest, the impact of these two Americans’ business ventures on Korea’s modernization was expansive. Besides running the electric company that first electrified Seoul, they are known to have been involved with various infrastructural projects, including the first streetcar line in Seoul, major railways from Seoul to Busan, coal mining in commercial quantities, the

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<sup>59</sup> Regarding this imperial technique propelled by economic interests, and the Japanese pattern in penetrating onto the Korean peninsula, see Peter Duus (1998).

<sup>60</sup> Brain Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, 19.

first waterworks facility, and even telephone installment. Any explanation of attempts to modernize Korea and urbanize Seoul at the time must discuss their involvement.

Their manifold endeavors to maximize profit did not confine them to carrying out large-scale infrastructural projects. Jumping on the imperial bandwagon of the US in pursuit of expanding its economic influence in Asia, these individuals were in the vanguard, opening up a bank to establish modern financial practices, running the Seoul Club Hotel and restaurant, and importing various Western goods (including cigarettes, as proxies for the multinational British American Tobacco Company in Korea).

As is well-known, the liberal penetration of Western powers in East Asia was precipitated by gunboat diplomacy, which was followed by the signing of a series of unequal treaties in the name of “free trade and friendship.” Beginning with Japan, China and Korea had no choice but to open their closed ports. Similar to its neighboring countries, in 1876, Korea was forced to abandon its long-held policy of seclusion, sanctioning three strategic ports in Busan, Inchŏn, and Wonsan for international trade. The only difference was that Japan, eager to emulate Western precursors, used its battleships to force open Korean ports. Korea’s open-door policy meant a remarkable transformation in the system of international relations and diplomacy in the region. The long-held Sinocentric tribute system in East Asia, which had persisted for ages, began to crumble and not only the circulation of new goods and people but also new ideas began to be facilitated. Indeed, it was a moment in which an early form of globalization had been shaped by “free trade imperialism” and was justified as adventurous

entrepreneurship by individuals.<sup>61</sup> As discussed in the Introduction, free trade imperialism or imperialism without colonies refers to imperial techniques of western powers through which they could reign in the remote territories instead of pursuing formal colonies. Tactical terminology such “protectorate,” “sphere of influence,” and “concession” or “leasehold” were deployed for a precise purpose — without bearing the cost required to govern the local population, Western imperialists could gain exclusive access to raw materials, markets, or naval stations.<sup>62</sup>

As an emerging world power, the US bore a likeness to preceding Western powers in its imperialist trajectory. In addition to the military strategy of keeping the Russians from moving south, US interest in opening Korean ports was mostly premised on economic incentives.<sup>63</sup> US penetration of Korea as such was accelerated with the diplomatic strategy deployed by the Korean monarch, Kojong, who wanted to take advantage of US intervention at a time of crisis for the sovereign, who was surrounded by imperial powers. In resorting to subservience to US hegemony, Korea wanted to counterbalance other Western and Japanese encroachments over the peninsula.<sup>64</sup> As a result, American syndicates were oftentimes the biggest beneficiaries of large-scale undertakings in Korea, whether in mining, railroads, or electrification (see Table 1).

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<sup>61</sup> For example, according to Bruce Cummings, the Standard Oil Company virtually monopolized on kerosene for the lamps of Korea, while operating an oil storage facility at Inchŏn. See Cummings, 126.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 11.

<sup>63</sup> Regarding Russia’s movement southward for the purpose of acquiring a warm water port in Far East in the nineteenth century, see Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Decline of Imperial Russia, 1855-1914* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 74-81.

<sup>64</sup> It was Horace Allen, the first American missionary in Korea who persuaded Kojong to interest the United States in Korea as a way of balancing other imperial powers at the exchange of the gold mining franchise to an American company. See Bruce Cummings, 125.

Although the US-Korean relationship deteriorated when the US ended up taking the Japanese side through the signing of the Taft-Katsura secret agreement in 1905, American influence over Korea had been no less conspicuous than that of the Japanese at the turn of the century.<sup>65</sup> It is in this historical context of differing expectations between Korea and the US that the two American businessmen Collbran and Bostwick were invited to the Korean frontier to acquire grants of royal concessions for construction of large-scale infrastructural projects.

	Concession	Concessionaire
1896	Inchon-Seoul railroad	American
1896	Mines in N. Hamgyŏng	Russian
1896	Mines in N. P'yŏngan	Americans
1896	Seoul-Ŭiju railroad	French
1896	Timber rights in Yalu basin and Ullŭng Island	Russian
1897	<i>Mines in Kangwŏn</i>	German
1898	Streetcar line in Seoul	American
1898	Electric plant in Seoul	American
1898	Waterworks in Seoul	American
1898	Mines in N. P'yŏngan	British
1900	Mines in N. P'yŏngan	German

**Table 1: Foreign Concessions in Korea, 1896-1900**, Source: Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword*, Berkley and Los Angelis, California: University of California Press, 1995.

<sup>65</sup> In the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese war, leaders of the two nations, William Howard Taft, the US Secretary of War, and Katsura Tarō, the Prime Minister of Japan, made an agreement through which Japan's sphere of influence in Korea was sanctioned by the United States in return for conceding US influence over the Philippines.

American expansion in Korea goes back to 1895 when the US obtained two concessions to develop the first railroad from Seoul to Chemulpo and gold mines in Unsan province. In the increasingly competitive environment in which various Western powers were in competition for concessions in Korea, what enabled the US to gain relative privileges in the emergent fields of investment in Korea was the intermediary role of Horace Newton Allen, the first Consul General of the US legation.<sup>66</sup> While fulfilling the Korean King's need for huge loans in his pursuit of reformation through the diplomatic intervention of the US, Horace Allen tried to attract Americans to the profitability of developing the Korean frontier. The first beneficiary for this concession hunting was James R. Morse, a friend of Horace Allen and the president of the American Trading Company of New York and Yokohama.<sup>67</sup> With the signing of contracts in 1895 for gold mining and 1896 for railroad development, which stipulated that "no taxes were levied upon the mines or their properties," the Americans began to establish a foothold in the new Korean frontier.<sup>68</sup>

Building infrastructure requires not only technical know-how but also huge amounts of capital, the major cause for granting foreign concessions despite widely aroused anti-foreign resistance.<sup>69</sup> In his effort to raise money to commence construction,

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<sup>66</sup> Horace Newton Allen was an American doctor who came to Korea in 1884 as the first Protestant missionary in Korea. He built the first Western medical center in Seoul and later became part of the US legation due to his close relationship with Korean emperor Kojong. For his comprehensive influences in Korea, see Fred Harvey Harrington, *God, Mammon, and the Japanese: Dr. Horace Allen and Korean-American Relations, 1884-1905* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961).

<sup>67</sup> Dean Alexander Arnold, *American Economic Enterprises in Korea, 1895-1939* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1976), 29-78.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>69</sup> In effect, an edict was issued that no more mining or railroad concessions would be granted by the Korean government to foreigners in 1896.



James R. Morse visited New York; it was there that the Colorado railroad man Henry Collbran had the chance to change his future life dramatically when he stopped in New York on his way to Europe.<sup>70</sup> As a British-born American who had settled down in Colorado after finding employment in the railroad industry, and then in burgeoning mining ventures in Denver and the Cripple Creek mining region, Collbran was the right candidate, with skills in both railroad and mining technologies. As Collbran accepted an option on a one-third interest in Unsan gold mining, he was hired by James R. Morse as the subcontractor to construct the first railroad in Korea, as well as gold mining ventures.<sup>71</sup> Collbran estimated the actual profitability of these engineering projects for a long time. Later, when the construction of the Seoul-Chemulpo railroad formally commenced in 1897, Harry Bostwick was invited to Korea from San Francisco as a new associate of Collbran.<sup>72</sup>

Once Collbran and Bostwick set foot on Korean territory, dreaming of big fortunes developing the richest gold-mine in Asia, their expertise in railroads and mining-related construction proved serviceable to other ventures as well. Having endeavored to receive additional concessions from the Korean court, Collbran's next move was to electrify Seoul. At the turn of the twentieth century, "Seoul was the first city in East Asia to have electricity, trolley cars, a water system, telephones, and telegraphs all at the same

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<sup>70</sup> According to Dean Alexander Arnold's research, "Henry Collbran had migrated to the United States from Britain in 1881. He soon made a reputation for himself in railroad work in the Midwest, first, and then, in Colorado. As a general manager of the Colorado Midland Railroad, he helped build the Rio Grande Junction Railroad, the Rust Tunnel on the Colorado Midland (one of the longest in America) and the Midland Terminal Railway of which he became president. While building the difficult line into the Cripple Creek mines and living in the mining atmosphere of Colorado, Collbran acquired some knowledge of mining." See Arnold, 65.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 80.

time,” even preceding the neighboring countries of Japan and China.<sup>73</sup> The interest in electricity of the Korean monarch had not emerged out of thin air. After the delegates of the US legation had returned home, a decision was immediately made to electrify the King’s palace by granting an exclusive concession of electric light and telephone service to Edison.<sup>74</sup> Korea’s first electrification proceeded by purchasing incandescent Edison light bulbs and building power plants to supply approximately 750 lights mounted in the Kyōngbok Palace.<sup>75</sup> Once the palace was electrified, Kojong sought to expand electrification to the entire city. This finally led to the establishment of the Seoul Electric Company in the form of a joint venture between the Korean monarch and the US

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<sup>73</sup> Cummings, 132.

<sup>74</sup> A year after the treaty between Korea and the US was concluded, the first Korean delegation to the US (K. *Bobingsa*) was sent in 1883 to view the up-to-date status of Western civilization. Since these high-ranking officials returned after witnessing this novel technology in person on their visit to the US, Kojong was very keen to introduce electricity to Korea. As the historic starting point for the upcoming technological transfer from the US to Korea, the object of the US visit by this special delegation was to engage not only with diplomatic missions but also to experience and observe industrial advancement in the US. After meeting with US President Chester A. Arthur in New York, the delegation travelled to Boston and Lowell, MA, one of the most prosperous industrial towns in the US, as part of their observational tour. While they were staying in Boston, incandescent lights were already installed in the hotel that accommodated them, a year after Edison succeeded in electrifying New York’s Pearl Street. Also, riding a US naval vessel and with the guidance of New York City’s mayor, they had a chance to make a visit to a plant facility in New York. On the same day, when they were visiting the forty-story Equitable Building, they were able to witness the entire process by which electricity produced by a generator was used to light up bulbs.

<sup>75</sup> Regarding Edison’s exclusive right to place and operate electric lights and telephone system in Korea, see *Despatches from United State Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, No.106, recited from Korean Electric Power Cooperation, *Hanguk chōngi paengnyōn sa* (A Hundred Year’s of History of Electricity in Korea), 75. When the palace was electrified remains unclear. However, several testimonies attest to the fact that around 1886 and 1887 the palace was already electrified. For example, Horace Allen mentioned that “[in] 1886, a fine electric light from the Edison factor was installed in the Korean palace and since then this and following plants have assisted in turning night into day for them.” See Allen Papers, Container No.7, 7, a speech delivered at various times on Korean incidents of interest, recited from Korean Electric Power Cooperation, *Hanguk chōngi paengnyōn sa* (A Hundred Year’s of History of Electricity in Korea), 79.

businessmen Collbran and Bostwick in 1898.<sup>76</sup> Based on his expertise, Collbran was recommended as the most suitable candidate to realize the expansive infrastructural plans. In a decade since the Palace was electrified, the streets of Seoul were to be illuminated as well. As the first electric enterprise company in Korea, the Seoul Electric Company was granted exclusive rights for large-scale engineering works related to electricity — including streetcars, electric lights, and telephone networks — that would greatly transform the material environment of the capital city.

It was their warehouse turned makeshift theater that lured potential movie-goers in Seoul, as in the advertisement we discussed at the beginning of this chapter. With thousands of people gathering to see the curious invention in less than a month, Collbran and Bostwick decided to take the opportunity to invest in this new venture. Encouraged by their tremendous success, they set up a separate amusement department within their electricity company; the makeshift stage of their warehouse was transformed into a permanent theater that could project regular nighttime screenings.<sup>77</sup> As one of the earliest permanent screening venues built in Seoul, the theater was now called the East Gate Motion-Picture House (*Tongdaemun hwaldongsajinso*). The stage was draped with the national flags of the US and Korea, and the program consisted of “films recently arriving from the US.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Oh Jin-sŏk, “1898-1904 Hansŏng chŏngi hoesa ŭi sŏlip gwa kyŏngyŏng pyŏntong (The Establishment of the Seoul Electric Company and Management Fluctuation, 1898-1904),” *Tongpang Hakji*, 139 (2007), 175-176.

<sup>77</sup> *Daehan Maeil Sinbo*, August 4, 1904.

<sup>78</sup> “Hwaldong sajin lyagi,” *Pyŏlgŏngon*, no.2, (December, 1926), 91. Recited from Han Sang Ŏn, 35. Also see *Hwangsŏng Sinmun*, August 14, 1906.

**AMUSEMENT DEPARTMENT.**

**EAST GATE.**  
Sept Sunday.

**한성전기회사**

nts. Seats in First  
Extra.

ures from Foreign  
ing and Instructive.

asonable price.  
ist Gate.  
P. M.

ping Horses.

lots.



서울사전과 대한과 온동양사전인 데 미  
 전이 옅고 미 주일에 사전을 함 것으로 다 밧고  
 고 전람 데 금 은 하 등에 심 전 이 오 상 등 에 이 심  
 일 외 에 는 미 야 에 여 덜 서 브 러 열 서 각 지 함  
 화 동 사 전 전 램 소 는 동 대 문 안 에 잇 습 고 일 요  
 회 략 부

**All Cars Run Direct to the Animated Pictures and Merry-Go-Round.**

**Figure 1.** A newspaper advertisement on the Seoul Electric Company's amusement department, August 4, 1904, Source: *Daehan Maeil Shinbo*.

The warehouse turned theater flourished until 1908, when the pioneering Korean entertainment tycoon, Pak Sŭng-p'il took over the operation of the theater.<sup>79</sup> The immediate reason was a fall in revenue possibly with the appearance of competitors, including Martin, a Frenchman who ran a movie house near the West Gate and whose repertory was mostly composed of French *Pathé* films.<sup>80</sup> Once the motion-picture screening was regularized, revenue amounted to 1,181.39 *won* in 1906 alone, although it

<sup>79</sup> The name of the electric company's warehouse turned theater was changed to *Kwangmudae* in 1907 a year before Pak Sŭng-p'il took over its management and expanded the program including Korean traditional performances.

<sup>80</sup> See Brian Yecies and Ae-kyung Shim, 44-45. To compete with the Seoul Electric Company's screenings, Martin adopted a differently rated seating system which offered reduced rates for children and differentiated screening repertories which was filled with *Pathé* films imported from France.

gradually dropped in subsequent years, until ownership was completely transferred.<sup>81</sup> As the monopolistic structure began to crumble and the theater confronted difficulties of management, probably in relation to the insufficiency of the supply of newer films to meet public demand, Collbran changed the name of the theater and considered expanding the venue from an exclusive movie house to a multipurpose theater by embracing traditional forms of performance in the repertory. In addition to screening several short films whose running time did not exceed ten minutes, live performances followed, including Buddhist dance and *p'ansori* singing of the Korean folk classic, *Chunhyang*.<sup>82</sup> Even a gramophone was used to provide music for intermissions.<sup>83</sup> Despite its brief span, it is undeniable that the Seoul Electric Company played a pioneering role in incubating entertainment culture in a rapidly changing Seoul. Exploiting their connections with the US and the Korean emperor's expectations concerning US investment, they were able to jump-start entrepreneurial experiments using the earliest film technology.

Returning to our initial question of why the earliest film exhibitions were held at the Seoul Electric Company, it may not be a coincidence that the proprietors of the electric company were also interested in the commercial potential of the new medium. Understandably, the most obvious connection would be that the operation of motion-picture projectors was indispensably dependent upon the power of electricity. Yet a closer look at the historical context that initially brought about these two “men on the spot” to Korea reveals that the history of early cinema is bound up with the coming of

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<sup>81</sup> Oh Jinsök, “1904-1909 *Hanmichöngihoe'saui sölipgwa gyönhhyöng* (The Establishment and Management of the Korea-American Electric Compnay, 1904-1909),” *Sa'hak Yöngu* no.88 (2007), 923.

<sup>82</sup> *Mansebo*, May 30, 1907. Recited from Han Sang Ön, 34.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

technological modernity, as Kristine Whissel has demonstrated, but in an asymmetrical way under the processes of imperial penetration.<sup>84</sup> Pointing out how the harnessed power of electricity revolutionized modern life, Kristine Whissel argues that “[m]oving picture technology was one of several new technologies that provide an outlet for the electric currents that revolutionized modern life by accelerating the urban and intra-urban traffic in machines, commerce, bodies, images, and communications.”<sup>85</sup>

Likewise, the advent of cinema in Korea would have been unthinkable without the electrification of the city. In this regard, it would not be a surprise if the two pioneers of electricity paid heed to the newly invented film technology and the ways in which it could be commercially utilized. In addition to the intermediary role of American concession hunters, whose transnational business trajectories converged in the simultaneous arrival of electricity and motion-picture screenings, it should be noted that various modes of representational politics, through which the newest technologies were presented in semi-colonial contexts, shaped the emergence of pre-cinematic culture in Korea. Before proceeding to a discussion of the shock of early cinematic reception at the turn of the twentieth century in relation to other wondrous experiences of technological modernity at large, we need to look at another missing link in the story of this contingent encounter between two American businessmen and the arrival of the motion-picture industry in Korea: sales of foreign-manufactured tobacco.

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<sup>84</sup> Kristine Whissel, *Picturing American Modern: Traffic, Technology, and Silent Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 118.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

## **Tie-in Marketing: Global Cigarettes, Local Promotions, and Early Cinema**

Another missing link that better explains cinema's contingent connection to transnational entrepreneurialism is tobacco. The earliest reference to tobacco in motion-picture screening advertisements in Korea dates back to 1906. In the three years since the success of the public screenings held at their warehouse near East Gate, the electric company circulated another advertisement informing the curious relation between tobacco and cinema. According to the advertisement, those coming with ten empty boxes of cigarettes manufactured by the British American Tobacco Company, including *Hero*, *Honey*, *Sweet Heart*, *Drumhead*, and *Gold Fish* were admitted free, despite the regular admission charge of ten *chŏn*.<sup>86</sup>

As these manufactured commodities were circulated, consumed, and marketed on a global scale, how can we account for early Korean cinema's association with sales of global tobacco? And what are the implications of cinema's earliest usage as part of marketing techniques, rather than serving as sheer entertainment, in this semi-colonial context? To further explore this missing link, what should be highlighted is the role of another man on the spot, James A. Thomas, a North Carolina-based tobacco sales agent who later became the managing director of the British American Tobacco Company's Asian headquarters in Shanghai, and whose career trajectory was imbricated with the coming of cinema to Korea. That the advent of cinema played out in connection with tobacco has to do with the cutting-edge marketing strategy of "tie-in" that Thomas introduced to promote American-made cigarettes in East Asian frontiers such as Korea. From the perspective of commerce and trade, the commonality between tobacco and

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<sup>86</sup> *Daehan Maeil Sinbo*, April 29, 1906 and *Hwangsŏng Sinmun* April 30, 1906.

early cinematic technology is their transnational circulation, closely related to the formation of trade networks in this early stage of globalization. In this sense, the sales of foreign tobacco in Korea is another site of convergence where the spread of early cinema is overlaid by the liberal impetus of imperialism.

Traditionally, Koreans used a long-stemmed pipe with a bowl at the end where tobacco leaves were packed. Upon opening the ports, however, the importation of ready-made foreign cigarettes brought a significant change in the way in which tobacco was consumed. Foreign machine-rolled cigarettes had first gained popularity for their taste and convenience after the first Sino-Japanese war, when affordable Japanese manufactured cigarettes were introduced to Korea with the influx of the Japanese population, including soldiers and other settlers.<sup>87</sup> The consumption of foreign cigarettes was accelerated further by the implementation of reforming orders in the Kabo Reform of 1894.<sup>88</sup> As a measure to liquidate vestiges of long-lasting feudalism, smoking on the street using the long pipe was completely banned. Unlike in Japan, where the import duty on foreign cigarettes was 150 percent *ad valorem*, and the government nationalized and monopolized the domestic tobacco industry in 1904, there were no such protective measures set up in Korea to restrain the penetration of foreign cigarettes.<sup>89</sup> Under these circumstances, it did not take long before the newly opened Korean cigarette market became a fierce battlefield for various foreign brands of cigarettes imported from not

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<sup>87</sup> Yi Yŏng Hak, “Hanguk kŭndae yŏncho’ŏp e daehan yŏngu (A Study on Tobacco Industry in Modern Korea),” (Seoul National University, Ph.D dissertation, 1990), 72-78.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>89</sup> See Chŏn Bong-gwan, “Yangdambae ŭi Tansaeng (The Birth of Foreign Cigarette),” in *Economist*, August 18, (2009), 152-154.



only Japan and the US, but also Turkey, Russia, and Egypt, while Korean cigarette manufacturers strove to protect their emerging domestic entrepreneurship.<sup>90</sup>

In this vein, the British-American Tobacco Company (hereafter referred as the BTA) sought to gain a competitive edge in its growing rivalry with Japanese or other imported cigarette brands. With the launching of Korean branches in Seoul and other major cities in 1904, the BAT attempted to supply machine-rolled cigarettes to the emerging cigarette-smoking population in Korea.<sup>91</sup> The owner of the BAT, the North Carolina-based tobacco tycoon, James Duke, already built his reputation as “an aggressive advertiser, devising new and startling methods which dismayed his competitors;” his inclination to invest in advertising led to success in penetrating markets in China, India, and Singapore.<sup>92</sup> As Japanese cigarette brands were already dominating the Korean market, however, the BAT, with Thomas as its delegate, wanted to adopt even more aggressive marketing strategies. The full-scale promotional events offered by the BAT included street performances of marching bands, “free of charge” giveaways of their cigarette goods, the screening of motion-pictures, and “tie-in” strategies such as the promotion of the use of newly implemented streetcars in Seoul by compensating empty boxes of cigarettes with tickets for motion-picture screenings or a streetcar ride. As a result, sales of imported cigarettes drastically increased for the three years from 1904 to

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<sup>90</sup> According to Chŏn, the competition between the BTA and Japanese cigarettes continued until 1914 when the Government-General in Korea declared monopolistic control over the tobacco industry and the BAT had to withdraw to China. Indeed, the production output of the cigarette manufacturing industry of the 1910s was the second biggest after the rice-processing business and the number of employees at cigarette factories was the largest in all manufacturing industries. Later, workers at the cigarette factories became the vanguard of the Korean labor movement.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>92</sup> Sherman Cochran, *Big Business in China: Sino-Foreign Rivalry in the Cigarette Industry, 1890-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 19. He also examines how the BAT used different strategies to penetrate Japan, China, and Korea.

1907, coinciding with the proliferation of early motion-picture screenings for various purposes.<sup>93</sup>

As a man of ample experience with a keen instinct for sales, Thomas was one of those entrepreneurs who had immediately noticed the commercially exploitable potential of motion pictures and attempted to utilize motion pictures for promotional purposes. Prior to his relocation to East Asian countries, Thomas sold American cigarettes in Singapore and India and “heard of moving pictures” while on his trip back to America.<sup>94</sup> Upon arriving in the US, he bought twelve “outfits” at five hundred dollars each, had films made “interspersed with cigarette advertisements,” and shipped them to China, India, Korea, and Japan.<sup>95</sup> Although concrete information on the model and brand of the “outfit” he purchased remains obscure, the cigarette advertisements that he interspersed in these films were likely to have been for Admiral Cigarettes and were the earliest example in Korea of using film technology and the visual narrative format of early cinema — produced by the Edison Manufacturing Co. in 1897 — for advertising.<sup>96</sup>

It is also unknown where in Korea and to whom Thomas sent these films with cigarette advertisements. It is probable that Thomas came to be acquainted with Collbran and Bostwick during his first stopover in Korea on his way to China in 1897. During this short visit in Seoul, Thomas “made the acquaintance of the American minister,”

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<sup>93</sup> In 1904 alone, the total import of foreign cigarettes increased threefold more than the previous year. In 1907, the total import value amounted to 120,000 *won*, marking over a twelvefold increase in the previous ten years. Recited from Chŏn, 153-154.

<sup>94</sup> James A. Thomas, *Trailing Trade A Million Miles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1930), 231.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>96</sup> Further information on the first filmed advertisement of Admiral Cigarette produced by the Edison Studio can be found at <http://www.2020-movie-reviews.com/reviews-year/1897-movie-reviews/admiral-cigarette-1897-movie-review/> Last accessed on March 3, 2019.

purportedly Horace Allen, who was the US Consul General by then, and his staff, “who very kindly introduced him to their friends and to Korean merchants,” through whom he succeeded in introducing American cigarettes into Korea in about three weeks.<sup>97</sup> To Thomas, selling manufactured tobacco in the form of cigars or cigarettes was “a trade which promised much for the future, but one in which the United States then had little share.”<sup>98</sup> As he boastfully confessed, he had gone to Asia “as a pioneer missionary to open these fields to American tobacco.”<sup>99</sup> Since his first visit, Thomas traveled to Korea several more times as the managing director of the BAT Asian headquarters until the BAT had to completely withdraw from the Korean market in 1914.<sup>100</sup> During the two decades of the BAT’s entrepreneurial struggle in Korea, the global reach of the multinational cigarette corporation had been increasing. As a way of controlling the Korean domestic manufacturing industry more effectively, the BAT established a factory under its direct control in Chemulpo in 1908.<sup>101</sup> In the eleven years since Thomas set foot on unpaved roads in Chemulpo, the factory there with cutting-edge mass production facilities began to produce cigarettes “from tobacco grown in the two Carolinas and in Virginia, but also others from Korean tobacco” to suit the taste of the Korean smoking population.<sup>102</sup>

During one of his earliest trips to Korea, Thomas was invited to Collbran’s home where Thomas showcased for Collbran and the guests invited for this private gathering the state-of-the-art technology of motion pictures. Encouraged by the enthusiasm aroused

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<sup>97</sup> Thomas, 71.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>100</sup> Chŏn, 154.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas, 71.

in the attendees at that night's screening, Thomas proposed a marketing idea to the proprietors of the electric company in Seoul to take advantage of motion-picture screenings: those who paid five cents for a ride on the streetcar all the way to the end of the line were to be compensated with a packet of cigarettes and a free ticket to the motion picture screenings.<sup>103</sup> Alternately, those coming with ten empty boxes of specific cigarette brands were to be offered a free movie admission as advertised in the newspaper. In terms of promotional strategy, the motion-picture screenings organized at the warehouse of the electric company proved to be extremely synergetic, boosting not only the use of streetcars but also the consumption of tobacco products. On the one hand, the streetcars operated by the Seoul Electric Company and leading to the East Gate theater at the end of the line were said to be filled to capacity every night the screenings were happening.<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, Thomas's plan succeeded in publicizing specific cigarette brands, which must have been followed by an increase in sales.<sup>105</sup> The cigarettes that Thomas gave away must have been well compensated for in this regard.

The intermediary role of a tobacco salesperson with a strategic mind for the coming of cinema to Korea can be understood in two ways. On the practical side, all these remarkable successes introduced to Collbran and Bostwick cutting-edge marketing strategies that could be used for expanding their entrepreneurship in Korea. When the motion-picture outfits were purchased by Thomas, even with a ten percent premium on

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<sup>103</sup> Whether free cigarettes were offered to those attending the screening cannot be ascertained in the extant advertisements. However, it is highly probable that Collbran and Bostwick were first exposed to film technology through encountering Thomas, who had already made use of motion pictures for the purpose of promoting the sales of cigarette.

<sup>104</sup> *Hwangsŏng Sinmun* July 10, 1903.

<sup>105</sup> *Hwangsŏng Sinmun*, April 30, 1906. According to the advertisements, cigarette brands produced by the BTA, including Hero and Sweet Heart were specifically indicated as exchangeable with free admission.

the initial cost, Collbran and Bostwick must have considered launching a new venture using this seemingly profitable visual technology.<sup>106</sup> Looking at the transnational tobacco connection in a broader context, however, points to the curious relationship between the formation of global trade networks and the spread of early cinema in this early phase of globalization. Carried by the trajectory of James A. Thomas, early cinematic technology traveled along with cigarettes to India, China, and Korea. To understand the origin of a Korean national cinema from a more material perspective, it is necessary to reconstruct the actual routes and passages of these transnational transferences.



**Figure 2. Streetcar ticket with a tobacco advertisement issued by the electric company in 1904,**  
*Source: Seoul Museum of History.*

<sup>106</sup> Brian Yecies and Ae-gyung Shim, 37.



**Figure 3. Tobacco advertisement mounted on top of a tram roof circa 1901, March 5, 1904,**  
*Source: Collier's Weekly.*

### **Rehearsing Train Effect on the Street: The Contested Techno-Politics of Streetcars**

In line with the economic motivations of the two American entrepreneurs' involvement with the earliest film screenings in Korea, another site of convergence lured Collbran and Bostwick to consider adopting motion pictures for promotional purposes: the first streetcar lines that traversed Seoul along an East-West axis. The tobacco sales agents' interest in using motion-pictures for marketing purposes particularly appealed to the proprietors of the streetcar lines due to the unsatisfactory business performance of their newly launched streetcar operation.<sup>107</sup> Contrary to the bright prospects the American investors projected onto the first streetcars in Korea, the implementation of streetcars had

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 231.

not been an easy or smooth process. New technologies such as streetcars were presented as celebratory spectacles; yet, they were simultaneously received as objects of fear and anxiety. In relation to this ambivalent reception of technology, we need to look at the complex workings of techno-politics surrounding the representation of modern modes of transportation.

Among many ambitious ventures pursued by the Seoul Electric Company was the construction of a six-mile-long streetcar line traversing Seoul from the West Gate to *Hongnŭng*. Having been extraordinarily keen to introduce electricity to his Palace, Kojong had been known to be interested also in constructing streetcar lines. Western science and technology were almost synonymous with “progress,” and the King himself wanted to be a purveyor of this process. At a time of sovereign crisis, forging a unified identity loomed larger than ever. In this process, what was of central importance to the Korean monarch was to appropriate the power of technology as a way of enhancing his authority, despite its vulnerability. The grand opening ceremony of the first main line to the *Chŏngryangni* in 1899 was quite a spectacular event. In addition to high government officials and aristocrats, thousands of people flocked to see the revolutionary spectacle.<sup>108</sup> To prevent possible accidents from contact with the running tram, 300 soldiers and 250 police officers were mobilized along the line.<sup>109</sup> Not only as a visual spectacle but also as a political ritual, the opening was used as a way to foreground the technological achievements of the monarch.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Min Suh Son, “Electrifying Seoul and the Culture of Technology in Nineteenth Century Korea,” (University of California at Los Angeles, Ph.D dissertation, 2008), 65.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>110</sup> For the ways in which technology is showcased as a spectacle and the ritualistic aspect of grand openings for newly launched infrastructures, see Brian Larkin.





**Figure 4. The opening ceremony of the first streetcar in Seoul, May 4, 1899.** July 15, 1899, *Source: Collier's Weekly.*

In this regard, understanding technological progress as cultural representation enables us to reconsider aesthetic dimensions in receiving new technologies. According to Brian Larkin, infrastructures have two functions, one technical and the other representational.<sup>111</sup> On the one hand, as a physical network enabling mobility, exchange, and circulation over space, infrastructures facilitate the centralization of political administration by connecting previously disparate territories. Although the population of Seoul around this time was estimated at 210,000 people, there was no public transportation system except for private operations of rickshaws.<sup>112</sup> Without a doubt, to the Korean emperor, the building of the electric streetcar line meant unprecedented levels of mobility showcasing his authority, whereas it may well also look to be a quickly profitable investment to the Americans with business acumen. On the other hand,

<sup>111</sup> Larkin, 7-10.

<sup>112</sup> *Hanguk chŏngi paengnyŏn sa*, 102.



infrastructures have the representational capacity that can be deployed to yield particular effects. As the opening ceremonies were the site of the display where infrastructural achievements were visually stage-managed, this latter representational function of infrastructure brings our attention to the well-researched topic correlating modern transportation with the coming of cinema. The “passenger-spectators,” a neologism refers to the parallelism between the two emblematic modern experiences of cinema and modern traffic.<sup>113</sup> The peculiarity of Korean history lies in that the term was more than a mere metaphor, for the same individuals laid the groundwork for the coming of both modern transportation and cinema-going.

As a matter of fact, had it not been for the phenomenon of modern transportation, more spontaneous “travel” on the part of audiences would not have been possible in the first place. In this sense, a tram ride would have been indispensable for the cinema-going experience to materialize. To those “passenger-spectators” who had filled the motion-picture screenings to maximum capacity, the new cityscape of Seoul lit with modern electricity seen on a tram ride must have served as a visual rehearsal before the actual experience of viewing moving pictures. At the same time, the unprecedented size of the masses who flocked to witness the triumph of technology in the opening ceremonies for the streetcar line was itself an overwhelmingly modern phenomenon. In a sense, modern spectatorship for the mechanized viscosity of motion pictures was being rehearsed on the

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<sup>113</sup> For the discussion of the perceptual similarities between the two modes of experiencing movements as train and cinema constitute a mechanical double, see Kirby. According to her, “the kind of perception that characterize the experience of a passenger on the train became that of the spectator in the cinema,” Kirby, 7.

streets during the tram ride or in the technological spectacles of the city decorated with flamboyant electricity.<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless, the reception of these technological achievements was by no means unanimous. As seen in the case of the Luddites in nineteenth-century Britain, as much as the triumph of technology was celebrated, embracing new technologies always met with resistance. Likewise, modern Korea's experience of the power of electricity and the mobility of modern transportation was rather ambivalent and contentious. The overarching implications of increasing Western influence complicated the process of new technologies taking root in Korean territory. Since these technologies had to be executed, operated, and materialized asymmetrically in a semi-colonial context, hostility to technology itself was readily mobilized to generate antagonism against the encroachment of foreign capital.

The most unpleasant part of modern transportation involved the frequent occurrence of fatal accidents that caused the deaths of Koreans "so unaccustomed to mechanized power," including children.<sup>115</sup> The uneasiness about the exogeneity of this technological transference resulting from the asymmetrical relations of imperialism amplified a reactionary technophobic syndrome, particularly when combined with anti-foreign nationalism. For example, a week after the streetcar began public operation, a child crossing the track near Pagoda park was run over and killed by a running streetcar. The outraged crowd who witnessed the accident blocked the train and dragged out the

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<sup>114</sup> For the discussion of how electricity and the nighttime operation of streetcars in Seoul contributed to incorporating cinema-viewing as a nighttime leisure activity, see Woo Su-jin, "Hyömnyulssa wa kŭkchangjŏk konggongsŏng ui hyŏngsŏng (The Formation of the Theatrical Publicity and Hyömnyulssa)," in *Han'guk kŭndaemunhak yŏngu* 1, no.20 (2009), 266.

<sup>115</sup> Arnold, 196.

operator. Seriously beaten and wounded, the operator fled, leaving the train behind, which was destroyed by the angry mob. The accident almost led to a protest targeting the Seoul Electric Company itself. Fearing that an unruly mob might invade their property, Collbran ordered his employees to be armed with guns and rifles and a high-voltage electrical fence was set up surrounding the company. Notices encouraging a boycott of trams were posted in the streets, and those who kept riding them were stigmatized as traitors. Agitation against the streetcar line became the kernel of anti-Americanism, with the potential for a further outbreak of serious riots. This first riot was quite a disturbance to the management of the streetcars until it was quelled by the intervention of the Korean army.<sup>116</sup>

To better explain the historical contingency of the origins of cinema in Korea, looking at these contested representations of modern transportation and the intermediary role of the Seoul Electric Company is necessary, both historically and discursively. On the one hand, nighttime motion-picture screenings came to be seen as a major managerial breakthrough on the part of the Seoul Electric Company. As the success of tobacco sales already demonstrates, their business acumen led the proprietors of the Seoul Electric Company to realize the elusive potential of the new visual medium. The film could entice stubborn onlookers who were casting suspicious eyes on the power of new modes of urban transportation and mitigate the xenophobic anxiety attached to it. In this sense, the use of motion pictures for the promotional purpose of a “tie-in” strategy should be understood in relation to early cinema’s delusive capacity, which leads us to reconsider

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

more historically the so-called “train effect,” the sensory shock and awe associated with the aesthetics of early cinematic reception.

Although the mythical aspect of this primary scene should be historically scrutinized, what is interesting about the train effect is its globally ubiquitous manifestation, either at the Grand Café in Paris or in a warehouse-turned-to-screening venue in pre-colonial Korea. To be sure, the motion and speed of modern transportation and its technologically mediated exhibition must have effected a contradictory state of mixed feelings, where sensational astonishment blends with horror. Notwithstanding, putting the two forms of audience reception on the same plane of comparison would certainly be misleading or a sort of theoretical abstraction, at best, irrespective of historical and political contexts. Did the recurrent repertoires of early cinematic spectacles resonate with viewers on the periphery homogeneously with those in the metropole, with the same intensity of affection? Put differently, can we understand the experience of the emerging mass audience in pre-colonial Korea viewing state-of-the-art skyscrapers in a metropole or the exotic representation of a “savage” civilization captured in a way to suit the taste of Western bourgeois sensibilities, without taking additional interpretive layers into consideration? It is in this vein that I suggest reexamining the role of colonialism in yielding and shaping the aesthetics of sensation of early cinema. Unlike contemporaneous Western viewers seen as a homogeneous, universal, and emergent mass audience, the train effect must have been articulated differently, precisely because the relation between cinema and the railroad should be understood under the unstoppable expansionism of imperialism.

## The Technological Sublime: From Cinema of Attractions to Sublime Cinemas

The first appearance of *hwaldongsajin* (活動寫眞), the Korean vernacular term for motion pictures, traces back to 1901.<sup>117</sup> In a short newspaper editorial, an anonymous commentator described the stunning experience of motion pictures under the heading, “the motion of pictures is better than that of living humans” (活動寫眞於勝生人), as follows:

Upon seeing motion pictures, people become fascinated by their novelty and extol their extreme peculiarity with their mouths gaping. Despite my awareness that those pictures were mechanically captured images, the way in which they are arranged to move in motion made me feel as if living humans are really moving in there. Indeed, it may well be called the moving of pictures. As the pictures depict soldiers on the battlefield at the northern part of China, they marched in a slow or fast pace, stationed in certain positions, which was alternately transformed into a dispersion and assemblage, took up their guns to fire and exchanged blows. All these depictions appeared so natural as if living humans are moving, alive. Moreover, even the commanding sound and shouting of soldiers appeared to be heard in reality. The motion pictures vividly depicted those who shot while tumbling, those screaming, and those running away out of fear while spears and swords were wielded against them. When the troops clashed, in particular, a cloud of dust filled the entire sky, which made the presence of individual soldiers almost indiscernible. After the screening, many people wondered how the machine created such delusive images. As they understand that it was electricity that made mechanically captured pictures, the corporeal materials of motion-pictures, put in motion, some of the audience lamented; when will our country be able to obtain *such an uncanny technology (myohan kisul)?*<sup>118</sup> [emphasis added]

Due to a lack of information, it remains inscrutable how the commentator was exposed to those superior moving images. Written after watching the newsreels depicting the marching of Chinese soldiers during the Boxer Rebellion, this short column is worth noting, as it shows the very primitive response of the first audience in Korea toward

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<sup>117</sup> Etymologically, motion-picture was first translated as *hwaldongsajin* (活動寫眞) in Japan around 1897, the literal equivalence to living and moving photography.

<sup>118</sup> Translations are mine. *Hwangsŏng Sinmun* September 14, 1901.

machine-made visuality as in the mythical recollection of the first Lumière brother's screening at Paris Grand Café.

Replete with wonder and admiration, the commentator's first impression of the newest visual technology echoes many well-attested descriptions regarding the overwhelming "reality effects" of motion-picture technology on the sensory perception of a credulous and gullible observer. The sense of simultaneity provided by the projected movements of the arranged pictures was so intense as if "living humans" came to life, and the sounds of the battle cry actually caught the viewer's ears.

Indeed, the popular repertoires of early cinema reveals how much the novel visual technology was obsessed with generating visual sensations. Natural disasters, fires, and executions, whether reenacted or not, constituted predominant repertoires during the cinema's era of novelty. Among others, modern warfare was an exemplary site where the most powerful experience of technology was encountered, with early cinema's growing sensorial appeal, including "physical jolts, shocks, and sensations."<sup>119</sup>

As a visual newspaper, early cinema provided startling images captured from big and small military confrontations that had been breaking out worldwide, including the Spanish-American war and the Boer wars. The Russo-Japanese war mostly fought on the coast of Korea, and Manchuria came to pique particular interest, and sensational visual footage captured by the dispatched cameramen were presented to the Korean public.<sup>120</sup> Needless to say, the true-to-life depiction of a bloody battle must have been striking enough to reinforce feelings of terror that would have followed the initial excitement. Just

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<sup>119</sup> Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema, and the Transformation of the Public Sphere," in *Viewing Position: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed., Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 138.

<sup>120</sup> *Cheguk Sinmun*, December 7, 1904 and *Hwangsŏng Sinmun*, August 30, 1905.

like the illusive threat of an on-rushing train in the form of mechanized visuality, the overwhelming depiction of a battle scene, albeit mediated by the new electric apparatus, also epitomizes a staple characteristic of early cinematic reception in response to the unprecedented sensorial stimuli of modern life.<sup>121</sup> In this sense, it can be said that the rhetoric of the train effect is nothing other than an aesthetic expression of the *sublimity* of experiencing modernity at large.

The fact that by way of motion pictures, the modern subject was perceptually exposed to the impending threat of a running train, the dreadful eruption of a volcano, or the frightful military technologies of guns and cannons should have been an aesthetic and psychological experience par excellence. Unlike the traditional sense of sublimity associated with an overwhelming appreciation of natural phenomena, what is central to the sensations produced by early cinematic projection are feelings of the technological sublime, provoked “not through the grandeur of nature but through the work of humankind.”<sup>122</sup> The shock and astonishment which pushed the first cinematic audiences to the point of fear was the harnessed power not only of modern transportation but also of the brand-new visual machine.

If we understand the train effect through the aesthetic lens of the sublime as such, it deserves attention as an explanation of the idiosyncratic formation of early cinema spectatorship. Following Tom Gunning’s insights, the focus here is not to describe the gullible and ignorant mindset of the childlike viewers and their credulity, but to examine the mechanism through which a terrified, disturbing experience at the beginning of an

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<sup>121</sup> For the correlation of the emergence of early cinema and the sensory thrill of modernity, see Ben Singer’s monumental research, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>122</sup> Larkin, 36.

encounter with motion pictures could be converted into a pleasurable, entertaining, and even gratifying one. Seeing that the initial terror generated by technologized and awestruck visualities was transformed into satisfaction, early cinema's spectatorship involved a radical transition, which may well look almost oxymoronic. Under what conditions, then, was this discomfort transformed into something bearable and even enjoyable? As I will show, this is the key to understanding the peculiar kind of visual pleasure offered by early cinema, based on "an excitement bordering on terror" in the words of a French journalist's description on the "train effects" at the Grand Café in 1896.<sup>123</sup>

To answer this question, scholars of early cinema have tended to highlight the sensational aspects of early cinematic genres or the mode of representation itself.<sup>124</sup> For example, under the rubric of the "cinema of attractions," Tom Gunning suggested understanding the "agitating experience" of early cinematic sensation "as part of the *attraction* of the new invention."<sup>125</sup> According to Gunning, a series of visual shocks is "the first mode of exhibition" that early cinema and other turn-of-the-century practices of visual entertainment — whose staple example would be roller coasters at amusement parks — had in common as a basic aesthetic strategy.<sup>126</sup>

Although the sensational peculiarities of early cinema, either in the mode of representation or in its subjects, are recognized, the viewer's perception vis-à-vis the

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<sup>123</sup> Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator," 121.

<sup>124</sup> Regarding the sensationalism of early cinema, see Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001) and Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8.3-4 (1986): 63-70.

<sup>125</sup> Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator," 116.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.



shock of new technologies (or modernity in general) requires psychological and aesthetic processing. In this sense, the “negative pleasure” associated with the aesthetic experience of the sublime in the formulation of Kant lends itself to further explanation. As outlined in the Introduction, the sublime can be experienced only by way of the subject’s self-awareness, distinguished from positive “delight” in the beautiful.<sup>127</sup> When confronted by any sources of fear and terror, according to Kant, a “rapid alternation” takes place in the mind of a rational and spontaneous subject, in which “we can view an object as fearful without being afraid of it,” an experience which resembles the uncanny dis-/pleasure of early cinema.<sup>128</sup> For this sort of self-awareness to take place, one condition is necessary; that is, the individual should realize that “we are all the more attracted by their aspect the more fearful they are, when we are in a state of security.”<sup>129</sup> In other words, the feelings of discomfort can be relieved only by securing aesthetic distance between the subject and the object and realizing that we will ultimately be safe from the seemingly dangerous spectacle impending upon us.

Returning to the above-cited newspaper column, a closer inspection, indeed, reveals a similar awareness that Tom Gunning suggested in debunking the founding myth of the first audience and explaining the aesthetics of astonishment as the appeal of the new viscosity. As Yi Sun Jin pointed out, the commentator in the column is well aware

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<sup>127</sup> Regarding the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, see, David Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 6. According to Nye, “..[A]s the mind is alternately attracted and repelled by the object, the satisfaction in the sublime implies not so much positive pleasure as wonder or reverential awe, and may be called a negative pleasure.” Nye goes further to point out that the function of this negative pleasure concerns uniting aesthetics with moral experience. Nye, 7.

<sup>128</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, (Oxford University Press, 1952), 504. Recited from Nye, 7.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 7.

that what created this *trompe l'œil* effect from the motion of pictures is the power of electricity.<sup>130</sup> In this sense, as Gunning asserted, it may well be pointed out that it was the superiority of the new visual machine and its representational competence that created an unprecedented sense of excitement rather than gullible and childlike mindset of audiences.

Likewise, the bloodiness of the battle scene that had dazzled people's eyes in the depiction of the newspaper column turned out to be none other than a simulacrum or *tromp l'oeil* object, although it served as a window onto a world virtually bringing the war front of northern China closer to them. The shock and awe of the first audience emblemized in the so-called "train effect" might have evolved into pleasure through a similar sort of mechanism of safety. To be sure, beholding the larger-than-life image of a running train must have caused awe and wonder in the first place. And yet, once the first viewers learned through repeated experience or education that the image itself was no other than an illusion that could do no harm, in reality, watching this seemingly dangerous spectacle could be gradually established as one of the most pleasurable entertainment forms of our time.

To conclude this chapter, however, I would like to complicate Gunning's problematic through adding another layer of interpretation that cannot be reduced to the Western examples; under the circumstance that the metaphoric reference to uncivilized savages encountering colonial powers in Gunning's words was not a mere aphorism, but a form of *Realpolitik*, my contention is that the experience of new technologies cannot but take on different shapes that sometimes exceed the universal rhetoric of early

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<sup>130</sup> Yi, 20.

cinematic reception. As Ana López aptly has shown in her analysis of early cinematic development in Latin America, understanding the initial stage of cinematic culture in peripheries within the parameter of Western modernity would be undoubtedly misleading.<sup>131</sup> Unlike modernity in Western Europe and the US concurrently incubated by industrialization, new rationality, and a series of technological innovations, “cinema was a predominantly import” in most areas on the other side of the globe and “the appearance and diffusion of the cinema” in these peripheries “followed the patterns of neocolonial dependency typical of the region’s position in the global capitalist system at the turn of the century.”<sup>132</sup>

The introduction of cinema to Korea took a similar path under the auspices of imperial penetration. Having arrived in Korea along with electricity, railroads, and tobacco manufacturers, the earliest reception of cinema can be better understood, taking into consideration the particular historicity and constraints of a semi-colonialist state. Given the uneven global context of modernity, however, boastful display of technological achievements, including that of motion pictures, inevitably reflected the asymmetrical structure between colonizer and colonized and “those who understand and control machines and those who do not.”<sup>133</sup> In this sense, it is interesting to see that the column ends by lamenting the nation’s misfortune in suffering from a technological lag compared to “those who understand and control” this marvelous technology. The sublime effects of these new technologies, including that of the earliest film technology, were based on a

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<sup>131</sup> Ana Lopez, “Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America,” *Cinema Journal* 40.1 (2000): 48-78.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>133</sup> Nye, 60.

specific kind of shock. Profoundly, it was the appeal of the superior Other and the shock of difference.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Aesthetics of Travelogue: The Panoramic, the Picturesque, and the Sublime

But the scientific attitude and the aesthetic one are absolutely not in opposition. The aesthetic attitude would have been impossible without being preceded by the scientific one, to begin with.

Kojin Karatani, *The Utility of Aesthetics*

While the first chapter examined the correlation between the penetration of capitalistic modernity and the coming of pre-cinematic culture through the lens of the technological sublime, this chapter continues to explore the inseparable relation between technology and ideology, especially in a colonial context. As a visual technology annihilating time and space, cinema arose at the intersection of the industrialization of modern transportation and the growing interests in geographic and ethnographic knowledge on the other side of the globe. Paying attention to the historical complicity between traffic, tourism, and colonialism, this chapter examines early cinema as a “machine for travel” — either actual or virtual — and traces how early travel films contributed to “making the world available in the form of spectacle.”<sup>134</sup>

In their attempt to visualize the cultural difference, how representations of travel were structured in early travelogues corresponded not only to idiosyncratic characteristics of early cinema but also to an epistemic system intrinsic to the Western visuality *per se*.

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<sup>134</sup> Tom Gunning, “The Whole World within Reach: Travel Images without Borders,” 29.

By drawing on three aesthetic categories that has been distinctively characterizing this mode of Western vision – the panoramic, the picturesque and the sublime, in particular, this chapter explores the seemingly ambivalent and yet paradoxical dynamics of the earliest film technology in which Western encounters with inferior cultures were visualized in negotiation with both scientific rationalism and aesthetic objectification.

For this purpose, this chapter discusses the two extant travelogues depicting turn-of-the-century Korea in the eyes of Western travelers with a focus on their historical contexts and stylistic conventions. Given the dearth of filmic materials that can attest to cinematic history during this early phase in Korea, two travel films produced by two adventurous Americans merit close attention: *Seoul, the Capital of Korea* (circa. 1901) and *Korea* (1912). Having been recently discovered and added to the private archive commemorating Burton Holmes and the American Museum of Natural History, respectively, the two travel films made in Korea at the beginning of the twentieth century are noteworthy both textually and ideologically.<sup>135</sup>

Through a close reading of the earliest travelogues, my concern here is twofold. In line with early cinema studies, which has scrutinized how vigorously early cinema endeavored to visually document the world, I want to locate the beginning of Korean film

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<sup>135</sup> According to Baek Mun Im and Jennifer Lynn Peterson, Geona Caldwell first undertook to produce a documentary about Burton Holmes based on his films that had been stored at his office in Hollywood in 1978. Nevertheless, his documentary project foundered due to the conflict with the Burton Holmes Society. In the meantime, as the society came to be dissolved, the whereabouts of all Burton Holmes related materials had remained unknown and thought to be lost until almost five hundred reels came to be rediscovered in storage in Pasadena, California in 2004. Caldwell decided to resume the cataloging work that he left off. Given the immensity of the archiving work, however, all Burton Holmes films were donated to the George Eastman House in New York, in 2005. See Baek Mun Im, “Pöt’ün homjū ūi sŏul kihaeng gwa yŏnghwa (Burton Holmes’ Visit to Seoul and Cinema),” *Hyundae munhak ūi yŏngu* 47 (2012), 69 and Jennifer Lynn Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 39.

history in the broader context of the cinematic world system in which early cinema prevailed as a hegemonic global cinema before the emergence of national cinemas. Viewed from the perspective of national cinema history, the origins of Korean film history have remained obscure not only due to a lack of materials but also because of its exogeneity. Nevertheless, I contend that the first chapter of the Korean film history cannot be properly understood without discussing these transnational connections and imperatives in bringing the brand-new technology to Korea. By looking at the historical contexts in which these Western travelers and explorers were brought to Korea, this chapter continues to critically reconstruct Korea's initial encounters with the technologized visibility that had originated from the West and constituted one of the multiple origins of the Korean cinematic history.

At the same time, what should be noted is that film technology functioned not only as a "seeing technology" but also as a "technology to be seen" during its earliest days in Korea.<sup>136</sup> In this regard, what deserves our attention is the subversive textuality of return gazes. To be sure, as much as the camera attempted to throw glances on behalf of audiences at home, it was constantly stared at back. Considering this reciprocal looking that might have taken place at the time of technological encountering between seer and seen, this chapter explores the ideologically diverse and ambiguous meanings of return gazes manifest with the two travel films. In addition to the textual reading of how disturbing effects return gazes in these travelogues created, I also pay attention to the uneven global structure that enabled the introduction of this novel technology in a non-Western context. In this sense, the return gazes in these travelogues bear witness to

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<sup>136</sup> Allison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn of the Century Visual Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 196.

Koreans' primal reactions to the Western instrument of vision. As in the well-known proposition of Mary Louise Pratt, therefore, those initial moments of contact in the turn-of-the-century Korea should be reconsidered as a contested site in which gazes of both parties "meet, clash, and grapple with each other" precisely "in the context of highly asymmetrical relations of power."<sup>137</sup> Having this *Realpolitik* surrounding the introduction of film technology in mind, I want to examine a reciprocal dimension in the exchange of gazes as a contact zone that took place in the process of technological reception. Before proceeding, however, this chapter starts by briefly recapitulating the emergence of the travel film as one of the first prevalent early cinematic genres in relation to the increasing commercial imperatives of the travel and entertainment industry. In seeking to incorporate the new medium's potential for their common goal – that is, consuming cultural differences in the commodified form of visual spectacle, travel developed an intimate relation with cinema.

### **From Actuality to Virtuality: Travelogue in the "Age of the World Picture"**<sup>138</sup>

As part of prolific non-fiction genre of early cinema called actuality, travel films culminated from 1895 to 1905 before the production of narrative-driven fiction film emerged from 1908 onwards.<sup>139</sup> Originating from a French word, *actualités*, actuality

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<sup>137</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 34.

<sup>138</sup> In a seminal essay titled "The Age of the World Picture," Martin Heidegger pointed out a modern tendency to consume the world through images. Following his insight, Tom Gunning suggests that early travel genre that emerged in the context of industrial and colonial expansion at the turn of the century "exemplifies what Martin Heidegger called the Age of the World Picture" best. See Gunning, "The Whole World within Reach: Travel Images without Borders," 32.

<sup>139</sup> Jeffrey Rouff, "The Filmic Fourth Dimension: Cinema as Audiovisual Vehicle" in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, ed., Jeffery Rouff, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1



films refer to “factual film” in its literal sense; in this genre, film technology had been utilized as a means of documenting current political and social events based on its true-to-life realism and have been considered to have paved the way for the consolidation of documentary and ethnographic film in the next two decades of cinematic development.<sup>140</sup> Under the umbrella of the genre, various subject matters from street scenes, scenic views, natural disasters to public events such as royal processions, parades, and coronations, were covered. Although most of the earliest actualities were no other than an extremely short and fragmented single-shot footage that required additional arrangement to be included in the program, they may well be called as a “visual newspaper” for its self-claimed accuracy and objective treatment in the depiction of affairs. Among others, travelogues or films with travel themes that were devoted to depicting scenic landscapes at home and foreign locales constituted a major subgenre for actuality film genre and prevailed during the first decade of film history.<sup>141</sup>

The popularity of travel films or scenic films during cinema’s formative days can be explained in relation to its ambivalent objectives in mobilizing the new medium’s potential: As a brand-new entertainment, the reception of earliest travelogues was located between uplifting education and commercialized entertainment. Regarding this particularity of the turn-of-the-century’s attraction, Jennifer Lynn Peterson has characterized it as “instructive entertainment,” that combined “didactic intentions as an

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<sup>140</sup> Richard Abel, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>141</sup> Lynne Kirby gauges that travel subjects constituted roughly half the titles in the Vitagraph Company’s 1903 catalog, while the earliest catalog of Biograph productions reveal that out of some 2,500 films produced from 1896 until 1902, several hundred were travel and scenic films. See Kirby, 19.

aesthetic commodity.”<sup>142</sup> For this dualistic orientation, the genre may well be labeled as “rational amusement.”

As an epithet, “window onto the world” suggests, on the one hand, travel films inherited from the educational impulse of the emergent middle-class practice of travel. As seen in the legacy of the Grand Tour prevalent in early modern Europe, through which young elite males, as a rite of passage, could be educated and extend their knowledge about the world, travel had been considered as a vehicle for education in the Western context. While surrogating actual travel, travel films played a pivotal role in visually grasping the world by bringing nearer distant places that were otherwise inaccessible to most Western audiences. The only difference was that the mechanically reproducible visual images of places that had been captured worldwide by dispatched filmmakers began to present to audiences “the whole world within reach” in the form of a spectacle, even without leaving home.<sup>143</sup>

In addition to catering to the emerging middlebrow clientele and their genteel taste, how these early actuality films were commercially consumed also suggests how sensational a genre it had to be. As the 1904 Pathé-Frères catalog remarked, the subject matter for actualités had to be “scenes of general and international interests” so that they could arouse visual sensations enough to “thrill the masses.”<sup>144</sup> When the scenes of war, coronations, and other ceremonies of international recognition were arranged to be screened with other entertaining repertoires in the program, the visual spectacles of

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<sup>142</sup> Peterson, 2.

<sup>143</sup> Gunning, “The Whole World within Reach,” 25.

<sup>144</sup> Abel, 5.

actualités also served as a source of pleasure for emerging mass audiences to leisurely consume.

Among others, travel films with exotic landscapes were one of the most common and popular attractions particularly for the commercial imperatives of smaller show entrepreneurs who sought to incorporate the new medium's appeal for low-brow show business. Continuing from a tradition of traveling shows that traveled from place to place with a variety of live entertainments, smaller entrepreneurs who used to practice itinerant exhibitions were one of the "the principal purveyors" that made these travel films accessible to an even wider range of audiences.<sup>145</sup> They integrated filmic footage captured in the warfronts either in South America and Europe into their repertory and toured the show to "small town opera houses, churches, schoolrooms, and vacant storefronts."<sup>146</sup> For the efficient circulation of travel images as an attraction, what was of great help was the already established networks of traveling shows. Providing virtual travel experiences most realistically, early travel films not only catered to the increasing middle-class interests in consuming foreign views to refine their cultural taste and cultivate geographic knowledge but also piqued curiosity from the emerging spectators with its sensory excesses and stimulations.

It is no wonder that the extension of transportation paved the way for the institutionalization of modern tourism upon which either travel or representations of travel could flourish. As Tom Gunning aptly pointed out, "[t]ravel had become an industry in which technologies of transportation and image-making were mutually

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 341.

beneficial.”<sup>147</sup> Indeed, as a machine for travel, early cinema was eager to film many parts of the globe from its inception.<sup>148</sup> Not only was it the extension of transportation infrastructure that enabled camera crews to be dispatched around the world in the first place, but also travel images captured by these globetrotters came to be circulated through the same infrastructure. This is probably why railroad and steamship companies served as major sponsors for the earliest production of travel films. The main reason for doing this was, of course, to promote tourism. For example, the Mutoscope and Biograph Company made a series of films with the sponsorship of the New York Central, the Union Pacific, the Canadian Pacific, and the Santa Fe Railways.<sup>149</sup> The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, and the Mexican International Railroad subsidized one of the Edison Manufacturing Company’s filming tours of the Yellowstone National Park, Washington, California, Oregon, Colorado, and New Mexico, which was even extended into some parts of Mexico.<sup>150</sup> Two years later, when the same film crew set out from San Francisco to Hong Kong for an Asia tour, it was the Occidental and Oriental Steamship Company that provided sponsorship, including free travel. Free travel, combined with additional financial support was a

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<sup>147</sup> Tom Gunning, “Landscape and the Fantasy of Moving Pictures: Early Cinema’s Phantom Rides” in *Cinema and Landscape*, ed., Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner (Bristol, UK and Chicago, IL: Intellect and The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 52.

<sup>148</sup> See Antonio Costa, “Landscape and Archive: Trips Around the World as Early Film Topic (1896-1914),” in *Landscape and Film*, ed., Martin Lefevre (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 245. According to Costa, “The Lumière operators reached Cologne, Madrid, and Amsterdam within the first months of 1896. Charles Masson travelled through Germany and then passed through Austria-Hungary. Marius Sestrier headed for Australia and then passed through India (Bombay). Alexandre Promio reached New York, and Gabriel Veyre arrived in Mexico. By the end of 1896 and the first few months of 1897 Constant Girel had arrived in Indochina and then in Japan. Other Lumière operators reached Latin America and China.”

<sup>149</sup> Gunning, “Landscape and the Fantasy of Moving Pictures: Early Cinema’s Phantom Rides,” 52.

<sup>150</sup> Jeanette Roan, *Envisioning Asia: On Location, Travel, and the Cinematic Geography of U.S. Orientalism* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 74.

typical arrangement of sponsorship. In turn, the transportation company's patronage was to be duly acknowledged in the filmed outcomes.<sup>151</sup> To be sure, travel films must have been the most suitable genre that could best correspond to the idiosyncratic quality of the new medium and the unprecedented mobility of the modern world in general.

In promoting representations of travel both as an educational tool and commodity as such, illustrated travel lectures would be an immediate ancestor that preceded the prevalence of travelogue. Having gained huge popularity from the nineteenth century to early twentieth century, illustrated travel lectures refer to public presentations about foreign locales, which were delivered by live performers and accompanied by visual representations using magic lantern slides. Built on a nineteenth century's pre-cinematic illustrated travel lecture format of John Stoddard, travel lectures of E. Burton Holmes which gained immense popularity can be contextualized at this backdrop in which the new medium was readily utilized for the dual purpose.<sup>152</sup> As the most prominent travel lecturer who coined the neologism of travelogue meaning travel and dialogue and first incorporated motion pictures with his travel lectures, E. Burton Holmes is an important figure to be examined for discussing not only the correlation between travel and early cinema in a broader context but also the first chapter of the Korean film history.

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<sup>151</sup> For example, for the specific pieces resulted from this ten months-long trip to Hong Kong, Hawaii, Japan, China and Philippines that were made possible following the routes under the steamship company's operation, Edison Film Catalog indicated, "The following subjects were taken abroad ship and in the Orient; China, Japan and Hawaii being the countries in which the scenes were taken. It is entirely due to the obliging courtesy which distinguishes all the high officials of the Occidental and Orient S.S. CO., of San Francisco, that the efforts of our artists proved so successful." Recited from Roan, 75.

<sup>152</sup> For the contribution of John Stoddard and E. Burton Holmes to the pre-cinematic establishment of travel lecture format, see Theodore Barber, "The Roots of Travel Cinema: John L. Stoddard, E. Burton Holmes and The Nineteenth-Century Illustrated Travel Lecture." *Film History* 5.1 (Spring, 1993), 68-84.

In the first place, what distinguished Burton Holmes as a renowned travel lecturer from other exhibitors was his use of motion-pictures: Holmes produced most of the films that he showed in his lectures.<sup>153</sup> Not only that Holmes was a member of Chicago Camera Club and had incorporated photographs for his lecture performances but also did the assistance of Oscar B. Depue enable him to adopt the new technology promptly. Having been working for Holmes as an operator and technician since his magic lantern tours, Oscar Depue purchased a 60-mm Gaumont camera from Léon Gaumont in Paris and set out the first tour to Rome, Venice, Milan, and France in 1897.<sup>154</sup> In other words, in addition to being an eloquent lecturer on the stage, Burton Holmes himself was an extensive traveler who explored the potential of the visual technology. With a keen interest in other cultures no less intense than those of ethnographers, Burton Holmes and other traveling cinematographers used their means of visual representation as a tool to visually grasp the world. As in his famous motto, “to travel is to possess the world” not only to these pioneering adventurous global-trotters but also to many ersatz tourists at home who would constitute potential clients for the emerging travel industry.

Travel to possess the world as such, albeit at the level of representation, was an extension of imperial enterprises in which knowledge about unfamiliar and otherwise inaccessible spaces was to be collected and produced. As a powerful tool for education,

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<sup>153</sup> According to Jennifer Lynn Peterson’s research, Holmes was “an early adopter of film.” Starting from 1897-98 lecture season, Holmes began to incorporate short motion-pictures, together with lantern slides, at the end of the presentation. However, it did not take long before motion-pictures became a central program in the lecture. In addition to publishing his travel lectures in the form of multi-volume book series, he produced Burton Holmes Travelogues to be released by Paramount Pictures. See Peterson, 35-39.

<sup>154</sup> Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 221.

those technologized imageries constructed by the film technology must have facilitated the process of knowledge production. Taking an example of Burton Holmes, as Jeanette Roan pointed out, there is a clear overlap between the proliferation of travel genres and the emergence of the US overseas imperialism.<sup>155</sup> Although Holmes himself did not foreground any political points of views or remarks for his lecture shows or filmic contents, and rather tried to let images “speak for themselves,” his successful career trajectory as a professional traveler and filmmaker would have been hardly thinkable without taking into consideration the “brute economic, political, and military realities of purchase and conquest” of imperialism.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, including the Hawai’ian islands, the Philippines, and the Forbidden City in Beijing, the earliest itineraries that Burton Holmes took, and the “extraordinary timing” that he could present himself on those spots coincide with the ascendancy of the US as a world power through engaging international wars and other types of interventions.<sup>157</sup> Particularly when foreign views captured thus were brought back to the US audiences in the form of lectures and public screenings, how they were received did not confine to the role of a “visual newspaper” or a “window onto the world” as a means of producing scientific knowledge. As I will show in the below, Burton Holmes’s stopover in Korea as part of his trans-Siberian tour in 1901 can be understood against this backdrop. The commercial imperatives of travelogue genre to

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<sup>155</sup> See Roan, 39-59.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 27-30. Beginning from the Spanish-American war waged to liberate Cuba from Spain in 1898, the US annexed Puerto Rico, Guam and Cuba became a protectorate. In the aftermath of the Spanish-American war, the U.S. advanced eastward to Asia. Hawai’i was officially annexed in the same year. Having purchased from Spain, the Philippines became a protectorate later. In addition, the United States intervened in the domestic affairs of China by dispatching soldiers to quell the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion in 1900.

incorporate new medium converged with the ascendancy of the US informal imperialism over the Far Eastern countries.

As a famed travel lecturer, Burton Holmes purportedly set foot in Korean territory first in 1901 as part of his intercontinental tour on the trans-Siberian railways, and then later in 1913.<sup>158</sup> What brought him to Korea in the first place? How did it relate to the bigger picture of his life? The reason why he mentioned that “[a] visit to the Korean capital would be one of the choicest tidbits on the menu of modern travel” seems to reflect his geopolitical awareness of the region.<sup>159</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, as explained in previous chapters, Korea was entering the age of imperialism carried out by imperialist rivals. While China, Russia, and Japan were competing over Korea, which led to military confrontations and bloodshed later, it was also the period that “witnessed the introduction of many fundamental features of the modern era” including communications and transportation infrastructure.<sup>160</sup> At the same time, the US was also expanding its political and economic influence over the region, after the colonization of Hawaii and the

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<sup>158</sup> The exact year and number of his visit to Korea is still under investigation among a couple of competing hypothesis. And the currently available visual footage is considered as combining records together taken during these two visits. According to Baek Mun Im’s reconstruction, the itineraries for his trans-Siberian tour were most likely to be the followings. See Baek, 73.

June, 1898, San Francisco to the Hawaii

May 1899, Vancouver to Japan’s Yokohama, Kobe, and Nagasaki

Japan to China via Shanghai, Hong Kong, Macao, Guangdong, and Taiwan

Taiwan to Manila and then back to Hong Kong

April 1901, Set off to Europe

June 19, 1901, Through the trans-Siberian railways, he left for Vladivostok

From Russia to Japan’s Nagasaki, China’s Tianjin, and Beijing

From China to Korea via Inchŏn on a Japanese mail steamer

From Inchŏn to Seoul through the newly launched railways

After his visit to Korea, he went back to Japan’s Yokohama.

<sup>159</sup> E. Burton Holmes, *Burton Holmes Travelogues* vol. 10. *Seoul — The Capital of Korea, Japan—The Country, Japan—The Cities* (Chicago: Travelogue Bureau, 1920), 5.

<sup>160</sup> Kyung Moon Hwang, *A History of Korea* (New York: Palgrave, 2016), 119.



Philippines. Therefore, the geopolitical importance of Korea in northeast Asia had become “one of the fierce zones of competition” that aroused attention from an American tourist.<sup>161</sup> Referring to the Seoul-Busan railway lines that had been under construction, Burton Holmes foresaw that the Korean peninsula would be incorporated into the continent as “one of the termini of the Trans-Asiatic line, surpassing Vladivostok and Port Arthur.”<sup>162</sup>

Like his previous tour to Southeast Asia, his entire itinerary in Korea was recorded using various media, including journals, photographs, and the motion-pictures upon which his later lecture presentations were to be grounded.<sup>163</sup> Based on these records, a written form of travelogue was separately published in 1901, which included more detailed information of this journey, together with numerous photographs taken along the route. His itinerary in Korea was included in the last volume of the series under the title of *Seoul, the Capital of Korea*, along with *Japan – the Country, Japan - the Cities*. Following the established travel pattern whereby he alternated summertime travel with a lecturing tour in the winter, these travel records were immediately incorporated into his 1901-1902 season’s lecture program. The short travel footage that will be analyzed below is believed to have been created as visual documentation for his lecture shows.

In addition to commercial imperatives of professional travel lecturers seeking to take advantage of the new medium’s potential promptly, what should be further scrutinized in relation to the popularity of travel film genre during the first decade of film history is the enduring Western fascination with the representations of the exotic.

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>162</sup> Holmes, 8.

<sup>163</sup> It has been known that Burton Holmes presented his trip to Korea at least three times for his lecture show including one in Chicago.

Historically, the popular demand for the exotic was already prefigured in the proliferation of pre-cinematic images of tourist destinations in picturesque postcards, magic lantern slides, and world fair exhibits that had been widely consumed since the nineteenth century. Regarding the Western mass public's ambivalent reaction to cultural differences, which came to be vigorously visualized and consumed via various representational methods, Allison Griffiths labels it as "wondrous difference."<sup>164</sup> Given the precinematic tradition based on the ambivalent appeal of the exotic, travel film's espousal with anthropology comes as no wonder. In this sense, while replicating hegemonic strategies of representation intrinsic to the Western mode of vision, travel films shared certain objectives with the scientific spirit of ethnography as a system of representation in which non-Western cultures were constantly aestheticized as others. And this explains in what historical background an American zoologist was brought to Korea to leave another visual record attesting to the moment of cross-cultural encountering by way of technology.

A decade later in 1912 since the first contact recorded in the Burton Holmes travelogues, Roy Chapman Andrews, a zoologist, explorer, and archeologist, who later became the director of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), stopped by Korea as part of his expedition for collecting and studying cetaceans for the AMNH. Having established his fame through his numerous adventures from Alaska, the tropical water in Southeast Asia, Japan, China, Gobi Desert, and Mongolia is what initially brought Andrews to Korea to observe shore whaling at Ulsan, a small port city facing the

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<sup>164</sup> See the Introduction in Griffiths, xix. "Wondrous difference," to her, "suggests the sense of both amazement and unease which have long inflected the reception of a wide range of images, moving and still, depicting distant and exotic peoples for popular audiences in the West."

East Sea (a.k.a Sea of Japan) where he spent two months. He was also known to have traversed the Korean peninsula to the north. As his *Whale Hunting with Gun and Camera* (1916) shows, Andrews was one of those pioneers who made use of the newest visual technology for his scientific expeditions and produced several ethnographic films about different regions of the world.<sup>165</sup> Based on the footage collected from his journey to Korea, a twelve-minute long film with the title of *Korea* was compiled and added to the AMNH collection in 1986.

Despite the decade-long temporal gap and difference in intent that distinguish Andrews from his commercially driven predecessor, the two travel films depicting Korea at the beginning of the twentieth-century share some generic features commonly evident in early travel films. Paying attention to stylistic conventions of these earliest travelogues, the rest of this chapter traces Korea's first contact with the Western mode of visuality depicted in these two travelogues. In doing so, let us approach this problematic from the opposite angle: how were these technologies of modern mobility — both cinema and travel — in turn, perceived by these primitive people? As Tom Gunning points out, early cinema was a global cinema with encyclopedic ambition to document the world, not only because almost every continent had been filmed since the inception of cinematic technology, but also because the Western mode of visuality thus produced was circulated to other parts of the world and almost concurrently viewed by local audiences in many

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<sup>165</sup> The full title of the book is *Whale Hunting with Gun and Camera: A Naturalist's Account of the Modern Shore-Whaling Industry of Whales and Their Habits and of Hunting Experiences in Various Parts of the World* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1916) and available at <https://archive.org/details/whalehuntingwith00andrich/page/n8> (Last accessed on June 1, 2019). In the preface of the book, he remarked, "In all of this work, the camera has necessarily played a large part" and "recommended" using camera for hunting whales to "anyone who is in search of real excitement."

different regions. Although previous studies of early cinema tend to focus on analyzing the politics of the Western gaze and the formation of spectatorship in metropolises, this chapter casts light on “a complex web of possible reception contexts” of this Western invention by looking at the Korean case.<sup>166</sup> As Rey Chow suggested, “non-Westerners also gaze, are voyeurs and spectators” and the Western instrument of vision began to be used by those who were previously objectified as passive spectacles.<sup>167</sup>

### **From the Panoramic to the Picturesque: *Seoul, the Capital of Korea* (circa 1901) and *Korea* (1912)**

As Anne Friedberg demonstrated under the rubric of the “mobilized virtual gaze,” travel and cinema are two modern apparatuses that extended the “field of the visible” dramatically in the experience of unprecedented mobility.<sup>168</sup> Let alone being directly propelled by the invention of new means of transportation such as railways, steamships, and automobiles, early cinema’s espousal of travel was an inevitable consequence. The uniqueness of the new medium was that it could depict the motion in a highly kinetic way. To be sure, no other early cinematic genre could have been the suitable genre than travel films that could best exploit the idiosyncratic quality of the new medium and the unprecedentedly increased level of mobility alike.

Most travel films from this early period were full of movements and functioned as a source of sensory appeal to many armchair travelers. According to Peterson, the common parlance of early cinematic camera movement that attributed a dynamic

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<sup>166</sup> Peterson, 140.

<sup>167</sup> Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 13.

<sup>168</sup> Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 15.

kineticism to travel film genre consists of two types of movements; one is the effects of a moving camera, and the other is the objects in motion.<sup>169</sup> The pan and the tilt are the first kinds of visual effects that the camera movement can create, despite without changing the position of the camera itself. The tracking shot shows a more dynamic sort of kineticism in which the camera itself keeps moving, which was usually taken from a transportation ride and reminiscent of the Phantom ride tradition in the late nineteenth century. Even in the case that the camera remains stationary, then, it was the image itself filled with movements — “such as a cascade waterfall or people walking through a landscape” that creates a sense of motion in the frame.<sup>170</sup> This sort of new perception has been discussed through the aesthetic lens of the panoramic. As if expressive of the optical experiences mediated by modern transportation, it may have been movement *per se* that is obsessively foregrounded in early cinematic genres.

At first glance, the two travelogues exemplify the styles and modes of the travel genre of this time and exhibit paradigmatic conventions — fragmented narrativity, panoramic views, street scenes, the use of tracking shots and returned gazes. What stands out most is the liveliness of location shots that give viewers a sense of immediacy. In this process, what is interesting is to see how much cinema hold onto the means of transportation for its obsession for being in motion.

In this sense, the deployment of traveling shots in depicting street scenes in Seoul commonly manifest with the two travelogues are worth looking at. Given travel film’s tendency inclined to mechanically reproduce movement *per se*, the most emblematic object that never failed to grip travelers’ attention was the newly launched streetcar

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<sup>169</sup> Peterson, 150.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 150.

traversing Seoul's main gates at an unprecedented speed. Combined with the constant flow of Korean pedestrians shot on the street or at the marketplace, the depictions on streetcars traversing the frame in various directions are good examples attesting to how sensational genre travel film was.

Moreover, one brilliant scene from *Seoul, the Capital of Korea*, provides the perfect example of a "panoramic view" taken from a tram ride. According to the classification of Tom Gunning, there are two kinds of panoramic view in early cinema; while it can simply refer to "a broad view of a landscape from some 'panoramic' point," it was also used "to describe films in which the camera was in motion on some vehicle: railway train, trolley car, motorboat, or automobile."<sup>171</sup> With recourse to the "spectator as passenger convention," as Charles Musser has called it, Gunning went further to explain the popularity of these moving camera shots in relation to sensational stimulation provided by modern transportation. Similar to the hyper-real experience of a "phantom ride," the intended effect of such traveling shots is to give viewers a virtual experience as if penetrating spaces and keeping pace with the speed of the moving camera (See Figure 5).

Unlike his predecessors, Burton Holmes was said to have incorporated subjective points-of-view when presenting his travel lectures, which in turn granted audiences with more personalized travel experiences (albeit virtually). Among others, "the passenger's point-of-view" shots deployed to describe his travel experience of local transportations merit attention.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Gunning, "The Whole World within Reach," 35.

<sup>172</sup> Roan, 34-35.

Similarly, the newly built streetcar in Seoul would have been a good chance for Burton Holmes's camera crews to experiment with this particular technique. For the two consecutive shots taken from a tram ride, the camera is virtually gliding into the air, keeping pace with the running tram while visually sweeping over the most bustling main thoroughfare in Seoul. The Burton Holmes travelogue recalled the moment that this scene was recorded as follows:

Could cinematograph pictures be projected on the pages of this book, or exhibited by means of some simple little instrument that could be operated on the library-table, then, one of our motion-pictures would at this juncture reproduce for the reader the sensations we enjoyed while dashing along the thoroughfares of Seoul on one of those swift trolleys first toward the East Gate from the straw-roofed suburbs – the gate looming bigger and bigger, until at last we curve through a courtyard, and plunge into the tunnel-like arch from which we emerge to skim straight away up the main street of Seoul, scaring horses, and spreading dismay among the white-robed denizens of the Korean capital.<sup>173</sup>

Having known the potential of the brand-new medium, what Holmes ultimately sought was to recreate or revive “the sensations” that he was experiencing “while dashing along the streets of Seoul” on a trolley car in the most realistic way, something that motion pictures could provide. As the scene was purposefully composed with pedestrians walking on the opposite side of the street and facing the oncoming streetcar, and “the gate looming bigger and bigger,” a sense of motion becomes even more intense and conspicuous (See figure 6.).

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<sup>173</sup> Holmes, 61-62.



**Figure 5.** A photograph captured during the tram ride shooting in Seoul, Undated Photo, *Source:* E. Burton Holmes, *Burton Holmes Travelogues* vol. 10. *Seoul — The Capital of Korea, Japan—The Country, Japan—The Cities* (Chicago: Travelogue Bureau, 1920), 76.



**Figure 6.** Frame enlargements from *Seoul, the Capital of Korea* (circa 1901)

Despite highly kinetic formal characteristics, the two travelogues seem to fit neatly into the category of “filmed ethnography” in their content. The rest of the films, by



contrast, are filled with rather stereotypical images conforming to the Western audience's expectations: native men in horse-hair hats worn over tight scull-caps, a group of women laundering in a ditch and stream, a flock of gawking children, the dancing of *kisaeng*, archery, bullock carts, and traditional farming equipment. As with other travel films in the form of popular ethnography, women and children constituted the central object of attention. With highly mobile and innovative uses of camera movement, the overall selection of subjects is built on a dichotomous juxtaposition of "stagnant" antiquity and "emergent" civilization. As one intertitle at the beginning of *Korea* indicates, for example, the first impression of Korea — the capital city of Seoul, was "a mixture of civilization and antiquity" and "fine stone buildings and crumbling huts of clay."

Similarly, pointing out that "the manners and methods of the Middle Ages persist in this quaint city of Seoul, despite the advent of electricity," Burton Holmes remarked, "Sharp indeed are contrasts."<sup>174</sup> In this sense, the main street of Seoul depicted as an opening scene in both films underscores the transient coexistence between premodern and modern. The widened thoroughfare in Seoul, seemingly the most developed cityscape full of signs of modern infrastructures such as electricity and streetcars, is still being shared by trolley cars, bullock carts, and rickshaws.

As many scholars have pointed out, there is an apparently retrograde and nostalgic tendency through which the dynamic cultural confrontation with the exoticness of primitive cultures and peoples is "transfixed" and converted into a still life.<sup>175</sup> Reminiscent of "dehistoricization" or "ethnographicization" in the attempts of modern

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<sup>174</sup> Holmes, 21

<sup>175</sup> Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 80.

anthropology, for example, Fatimah Tobing Rony has called this hegemonic process of visual appropriation in the mode of early cinema's representation "taxidermy."<sup>176</sup>

Regarding "a paradox" of ethnographic film genre to provide more genuine and authentic representations of "so-called vanishing culture," than it really is, she called it as "romantic preservationism" nearly comparable to the technique of taxidermy.<sup>177</sup> Contrary to the quasi-scientific spirit of objectivity in filmed ethnography, subject matters are carefully interpreted, selected, and omitted in these travelogues. Just like cartography, ethnographic interest in early travel films sought to document the world, but "transfixed" them in a particular order.

In this regard, another emblematic aesthetic term that can best describe the stylistic particularity of early travelogues is the "picturesque." As an aesthetic term whose literal meaning is "like a picture" or "from a picture," and expressive of rather romantic sensibilities toward the discovery of nature, the picturesque aroused in the eighteenth century Britain for landscaping painting and garden design.<sup>178</sup> As an aesthetic and technical process to turn nature into a landscape within the frame or for gardening, the picturesque, indeed, is a way of viewing, which has to do with something ideal and "agreeable in a picture" and thus can be better understood when compared with the two other aesthetic concepts — the beauty and the sublime.<sup>179</sup> Distinguished from the

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<sup>176</sup> Rony, 102. Drawing on Donna Haraway's use of the term as a metaphor oftentimes deployed to represent indigenous peoples, Rony points out that the very technique used for preserving dead human body is inherited to various visual media including photography, film, and wax figures in which death is inevitably acknowledged but the object should be preserved to be whole.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>178</sup> The seminal and foundational essays that defined the concept of the picturesque were written by British theorist in the eighteenth century including William Gilpin and Uvedale Prince.

<sup>179</sup> See Uvedale Prince, *On Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London, J. Robson, 1794). Also the electronic version of the book is available at

classical depiction of the ideal beauty with perfect harmony, composition and symmetry and also from the overwhelming sense of horror, awe, and fear of the sublime experience, what characterizes the picturesque best is the mediating qualities between the two other extremes, — that is beautiful but with a tinge of roughness, wildness, and irregularity of nature.<sup>180</sup>

With the popularity of travel and travel films, the concept was mobilized to depict the appeal of cinematic landscape, especially those scenic views captured from travel and was frequently used in advertisements. For example, a description of *Scenes in Korea* (dir. William Nicholas Selig, 1912) in the catalog reads “another picturesque travel picture, giving a glimpse of the life and habits of these Oriental people.”<sup>181</sup> What makes the depiction of the exotic life and habits of Oriental people scenic and picturesque? How can we account for the rampancy of “primitive passions” conjoined with the state-of-the-art visual technology and travel industry?

To answer these questions, it would be necessary to understand the concept of picturesque in relation to another critically polyvalent term, landscape. When it comes to cinematic landscape, it is not “discovered” but “constructed,” through the aesthetic, cultural, or social process of selection, interpretation, and omission. In this regard, the ways in which the wilderness of the American Southwest had been mythologized in their earliest cinematic treatment shows that the picturesque means a nostalgic comprehension of landscape and people, “precisely when they are perceived as being lost.”<sup>182</sup> While

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<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=gri.ark:/13960/t3711pf4j&view=1up&seq=5>. Last accessed on May 5, 2019.

<sup>180</sup> For the detailed discussion of the concept in relation to cinema and travel films, see Peterson, 182-191 in chapter 5.

<sup>181</sup> Peterson, 175.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 84.

threatening scenery in the western frontier had been fantasized as virgin wilderness the lives of indigenous people, including Native Americans, constituted an indispensable part of the picturesque landscape. Similarly, the vanishing native cultures of these primitive peoples, replete with accurate, authentic, credible details untainted by the influence of Western cultures, were supposedly preserved as the picturesque. Therefore, with self-proclaimed objectivity, the passion for “those scenes of rituals, dance, food preparation, [and] indigenous technology (pottery-making, for example)” appearing in almost every travel film was the product of the Western traveler’s scopic projection, which was surely reflective of imperial hierarchies.<sup>183</sup>

As Jennifer Lynn Peterson demonstrates, the picturesque is a cinematic technique prevalent in early travel films and was central to their attempts to find “examples of the ‘past’ existing in the present.”<sup>184</sup> In this sense, the picturesque is not confined to describing scenic landscapes. For example, one Edison travelogue titled *Picturesque Darjeeling, India* (1912) provides an interesting definition of the concept in a promotional flyer. After describing awe-inspiring landscapes in the Himalayan Mountains, it states: “As picturesque as the scenery are the people whose habits and customs have stayed stagnant in the onward march of civilization.”<sup>185</sup> Not unlike idealized landscapes, in the conventions of early non-fiction’s commercialized style, “primitive peoples costumed in native dress performing premodern local customs” are easily commodified as consumable images and can be described as “picturesque,” detached from their real social conditions.<sup>186</sup> With recourse to the aesthetic concept of the

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>185</sup> Recited from Peterson, 176.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 188.

picturesque, the clichéd depictions mentioned above can be understood in line with this particular way of seeing that the two American adventurers exerted in representing the unfamiliar culture and people of Korea.

### **From the Picturesque to the Sublime: When Technology Is Looked Back At**

As Baek Mun Im, a Korean film scholar, points out, in juxtaposing vanishing antiquity and new civilization, however, Holmes displays somewhat mixed feelings.<sup>187</sup> When he describes a river town along the Han River as “picturesque,” Holmes, indeed, heavily relied on conventions of early travel films in representing his encounters in Korea.<sup>188</sup> Reminded of freshness and calm — as the old name of Korea, Chosŏn, which means “the country of morning calm,” suggested to him — the pictorial vistas of this small village aroused in him a soothing feeling. In defense of this serenity of the Hermit Kingdom, he considered the growing influence of Western industrial technology over the traditional way of Korean living as ruining the authenticity of Korea. For example, pointing out the erection of western-style buildings and trolley cars as unsightly, he lamented the transformation of the material landscape of the capital city in Korea as follows:

On esthetic grounds, Korea would be justified in demolishing the hideous buildings with which the unpardonable bad taste of the foreigner has disfigured the most conspicuous elevations within the city walls. But quite as hideously incongruous as the missionary buildings are the trolley cars in Seoul. They should have been made look like dragons, or junks, or sedan chair on wheels but alas! The uncompromising spirit of the white man imposes on all the Oriental lands he conquers commercially or industrially the stamp of utilitarian ugliness, which he regards as the sign and badge of Occidental civilization.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Baek, 47.

<sup>188</sup> Holmes, 77.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 57.

At first glance, in the above-cited comments, Holmes seems to find reprehensible Western incursions at the level of commerce and industry, for which missionaries and entrepreneurs stood in the vanguard. To read between the lines, however, one can easily notice that he never challenges and firmly maintains essentialist conceptions of civilization, which are built on an attempt to aestheticize the otherness of the Orient.

The divide between the Orient and the Occident seems to loom larger when it comes to who is entitled to control technology. As discussed in Chapter One, modern infrastructure, including streetcars and electricity, began to materialize in Korea around this time through the granting of concessions to Western entrepreneurs. In this process, the American settler businessmen were the most advantaged beneficiaries. In fact, Burton Holmes seems to have encountered and interacted with these Americans during his stay in Korea. This reminds us of the extraordinary timing that brought Holmes to the Hawaiian Islands, the Philippines, and the Forbidden City in Beijing: the development of the US overseas imperialism. According to Baek Mun Im, the entire Seoul tour of Burton Holmes—including the panoramic view taken from a tram ride, which was possibly arranged by the sponsorship of the proprietor of the electric company in Korea — represented the spatial and temporal transformation of an old city in Korea and that those in possession of technology — “Americans with electricity” in particular — were the ones giving it shape.<sup>190</sup> While reserving the picturesque for the representation of Oriental peoples, Burton Holmes, who himself was equipped with technology capable of staging them in concert with established conventions, may have aligned his perspective with that

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<sup>190</sup> Baek, 83.

of audiences at home as a surrogate traveler, who had to be assured of their civilization's superiority abroad.

In other words, the "lure of the exotic" probably lied in the confirming process in which technological mastery of the Western civilization was to be ascertained when juxtaposed with the pre-modern state of inferior races and their technological incompetence. As Tom Gunning and Kristine Whissel pointed out, in a sense, cinema capable of producing mechanized visions could mean the mastery or control of technology. Thus, while forming a technological complex, cinema as technology could generate effects as similar as other military technologies that had been boastfully displayed in the majestic size of navy ships.<sup>191</sup> And this is why the early travel genre and war pictures oftentimes cut across each other in the film manufacturer's catalog.<sup>192</sup> As in the title of Andrews's book, the camera in both films functioned as a visual weapon of imperialism in that it helped to reinforce the long-held Western perception on the Oriental cultures and their otherness. Nonetheless, either Burton Holmes and Roy Chapman Andrews never considered the fact that his technology was also being looked at nor that it would be utilized by these primitive peoples for their own representation before long.

As a way of challenging this dichotomy at work surrounding the exertion of technology, I would like to return to the question of what happens when non-Westerners gaze back. In this vein, the so-called "return gaze" needs more scrutiny, particularly as it speaks to the possible fascination, thrill, or awe that might have been aroused from both

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<sup>191</sup> See Kristine Whissel, *Picturing American Modernity* for early cinema's role to promote military nationalism. Also, see Tom Gunning, "The Whole World within Reach."

<sup>192</sup> Gunning, "The Whole World within Reach," 31.

seers and seen at the time of colonial encounter. By returning their gazes back at the camera, those primitive peoples, in a sense, seem to be rebelling against the attempt to possess them as a mere passive spectacle and “to capitalize on [their] geographical, cultural, racial and gender differences.”<sup>193</sup>

The two films under consideration in this chapter are replete with exchanges of gazes. To the extent that almost every single shot ended up containing Korean people’s stares back at the camera, the return gaze is too ubiquitous to be neglected in discussing these films. On the one hand, some of the looks resulted unintentionally from the filmed subject’s spontaneous response, which could have been captured while they were accidentally passing the scene or following the film crews out of curiosity (gawking children are exemplary). On the other hand, some of the looks were apparently “posed” according to the request of the filmmaker. As to the latter kind, *Korea* (1912), which was supposedly produced with a more “scientific” imperative of a naturalist’s point of view, in contrast to the commercial motivations of Burton Holmes, displays ample examples of “looks at the camera.” Most of them are framed in medium or close-up shots to show the facial traits of these individuals, including sizes, shapes, proportions, and even expressions (See Figure 7).

In line with the scientific fervor implicated in the nineteenth century’s anthropometry, these tableau shots in *Korea* show various destitute figures, following the conventions of popular ethnographic representations. According to Peterson, travelogue films shared the conventions of anthropometric photography that staged “portraits of individuals frontally and in profile” that “allows the film spectator to gawk at” their

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<sup>193</sup> Peterson, 169.



physical features and expand scientific knowledge on native “types.”<sup>194</sup> As seen in Figure 7, Andrews seems to have aimed at a sort of ethnological typology here by meticulously composing the frame as such, just as he had done for whales. “In an operation of optical empiricism,” the various individuals captured below must be subjects who were carefully selected for his anthropological investigation.<sup>195</sup> Distinguished from more spontaneous return gazes, these people may have been asked to strike a “pose” before the camera, according to the filmmaker’s deliberate instruction.



**Figure 7. Various return gazes captured from *Korea* (1912)**

<sup>194</sup> Peterson, 167.

<sup>195</sup> Griffiths, 96.

Another interesting example of the return gaze from *Korea* is a panning sequence taken from the bustling street on a market day. The camera is observing a trickster performing, surrounded by a crowd. After presenting an establishing shot having the trickster at the center and the audience surrounding him in the background, the scene cuts to close-up shots of “a varied audience.” Except for the fact that the camera is slowly moving from left to right, this fluent panning sequence is also full of glares looking back at the camera just like tableau shots collected in Figure 7 (See Figure 8). What makes this scene notable, however, is the multiple layers of gaze exchanges that are taking place at the same time. While the camera is purportedly looking at the scene of the performance, audiences who initially flocked to see the crown’s performance begin to turn their eyes to the camera. Once it is declared in the intertitle that from now on, the audience is to be documented, a reversal of point-of-views occurs. With their gazes shifted back to the camera, their status as the spectacle posing for the camera is suddenly defied as they begin to constitute spectators who are also capable of casting their eyes back at the camera’s attempt to capture them.

Despite the privileged invisibility of the filmmaker in the frame, to what do these return gazes of these multiple spectators gesture? As discussed previously, any analysis of the return gaze must assume two levels of scopic encounter: “an encounter at the moment of production between the filmmaker/camera and the person being filmed, and an encounter at the moment of the exhibition between the person in the image and the person looking at the image.”<sup>196</sup> In this sense, the answer to the above question can be either the camera itself with the filmmaker behind it or future audiences back in the

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<sup>196</sup> Peterson, 173.

metropole who would potentially watch the film later. As the look at the camera has mostly been discussed in psychoanalytic or feminist film theory's analysis of cinematic gazes in general, the focus tends to be placed on the latter sort of encounter. If the return gaze in this travelogue can bring disturbance at the level of representation, it does so by reflexively bringing the act of voyeuristic identification to the attention of viewers, whose perspective is otherwise cleanly aligned with that of the camera, and thus sabotaging the illusionary sense of virtual travel experience.



Figure 8. A panning sequence depicting a trickster performance and its audiences in *Korea* (1912)

The most disturbing significance of “the look at the camera,” according to Peterson, lies in that it confronts the camera’s fetishistic desire to fix its objects as a picturesque landscape deprived of the real social and political conditions in which they are situated. Those individuals in the frame would have been carefully staged in conformity with pre-established expectations in the eyes of a Western traveler stopping over in Korea. Nevertheless, the variety of their facial expressions could not be prearranged by the coordination of the filmmaker. Even though there is no way to anchor the meaning of these facial expressions in hindsight, what should be noted is that these are also the signs of interaction at the moment of the historical encounter during which Koreans were first exposed to cinema as a Western instrument of vision.

To better understand what these looks are gazing at, let us bring our attention back to the actual social and political conditions that are easy to bracket if we consider scopic politics only at the level of representation. From the perspective of the native people in Korea, the earliest film technology was introduced through a representation of travel produced by a Western traveler who arrived with steamships, railways, and electricity. What these individuals were looking back at might not be the psychological individuality of the filmmaker at all, but rather these Western technologies and institutions, and their backdrop of military superiority, all of which were beginning to make their presence more and more visible in Korea. As one intertitle remarked, “You [Koreans] may look strange to us, but no doubt we [Americans] are as strange to you!”<sup>197</sup> Paying attention to this more immediate, integrating, and affective moment of encounter to which those primitive peoples came to be exposed by the confrontation with the

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<sup>197</sup> *Korea* (dir. Roy Chapman Andrews, 1912), 13:45

Western instrument of vision, I will turn to the sublime moments in which these encounters took place.

### **A Sublime Moment**

With regard to the initial audience reception of early cinema, in Chapter One, I discussed the sensory shock of the first encounter with the motion-picture technology, electricity, and modern transportation through the lens of the technological sublime. In line with the effort to articulate the experience of modern technology aesthetically, I contend that the strategies of the picturesque adopted as the most common mode of travel representation in early travelogues can be better understood when considering its counterpart concept – i.e. the sublime.

To examine the sublime in relation to travel film, three stylistic dimensions can be discussed. In the first place, what should be noted is that mechanized representations on cultural difference have to do with the long-held bias on the Orient in the Western tradition. How can the inferiority of other civilization be the object of worshipping and disregarding at the same time? As Karatani Kojin suggests, the sublime logic of aestheticization explains an epistemic premise upon which the lure of the exotic can flourish despite the rise of the rationalism of the Enlightenment in the West.<sup>198</sup> According to him, to aestheticize the seemingly inferior others and to accumulate scientific knowledge about them are like two sides of the same coin, which are not entirely incompatible.<sup>199</sup> Although neither of them is based on in a true understanding of the other, these are phenomena of mutual supplementation, in that both worshipping and

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<sup>198</sup> Karatani, 149.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 153.

disregarding are the outcome of the same passion for objectifying others. To explain this somewhat oxymoronic state in which the pleasure of worship coexists with the displeasure of civilizational hierarchies, Karatani draws on a Kantian reading of the sublime: What distinguishes the Kantian sublime from religious awe lies in the capacity of “self-alienation” of human reason that can “bracket the interest” for aesthetic appropriation.<sup>200</sup> In other words, the viewer can process the initial negative feelings into bearable ones precisely because of the viewer’s superior position and reassurance that s/he won’t be affected by the pressing danger.

The experience of travel films provided in the form of an ersatz tour is exactly reminiscent of this sort of negative pleasure. As Tom Gunning remarked regarding the seemingly masochistic spectatorship of early cinema, “the sensations of imminent danger can be offered as pleasurable entertainment because the peril is illusionary, and the spectator can have her thrill while safely seated in a theater.”<sup>201</sup> Likewise, the lure of the exotic can be enjoyed due to the security of the cinema seat and obtained because the armchair traveler shares the travel experience only virtually. And this leads us to another discussion that can explain the sublimity implicated with the lure of the exotic of the travel film genre.

Secondly, the picturesque as deployed in early travelogues is nothing but “a commercialized form of the sublime,” as Peterson suggests.<sup>202</sup> As part of an attempt to commodify cultural difference, as she points out, “the picturesque instead soothes the viewer with idealized landscape imagery” rather than overwhelming the viewers.<sup>203</sup> The

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>201</sup> Gunning, “The Whole World within Reach,” 40.

<sup>202</sup> Peterson, 176.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 176.

only difference was that large-scale projections of natural landscapes, such as vast vistas, the untamable wilderness of the American West, or the description of mountains with a tinge of awe and majesty, were replaced with describing the customs and cultures of primitive peoples.<sup>204</sup> In a similar fashion that explained the sublimity of virtual travel experiences in the above, the cinematic technique of the picturesque is a good manifestation of the technological sublime. The fact that primitive peoples and cultures were to be objectified in such a nostalgic way may have been expressive of the self-confidence of the West, so assured of their own civilizational superiority, which takes us to the last sublime dimension of the travelogue genre.

The last sort of the sublime has to do with the subversive textuality of return gaze. In theorizing returned gazes in relation to the spectator's awareness of the act of voyeurism, Jennifer Lynn Peterson classified two types of encounters between gazes. According to her, the first encounter involves "the moment of production between the filmmaker/camera and the person being filmed," while the latter takes place "at the moment of the exhibition between the person in the image and the person looking at the image."<sup>205</sup> In previous studies focusing on the scopic politics of a Western point-of-view projected on the spectacle, or the formation of spectatorship that shares a virtual gaze with that of the camera, the latter kind of exchange has always been of primary concern. Under the rubric of the cinema of attractions, in particular, much effort has been put into showing how disturbingly or subversively this "look at the camera" confused any attempt

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 176-177.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 173.



to provide seamless and smooth representations by calling attention to the constructedness of the image.<sup>206</sup>

Regarding this unstable and unintended textuality of early travel film, Tom Gunning seems to attribute a sublime quality that breaks away and goes beyond the narrative film's strategy to draw viewers' voyeuristic identification with the images represented. In analyzing a single-shot film produced by the Edison company, which depicts a native Indian woman washing a baby, he pays attention to a weird deployment of a reverse angle in which the camera suddenly rotates, making a half-turn toward the end. With this swift turn, what newly comes into the viewer's sight is a group of native children and adults who have been gawking at the filming process. With the camera's pivot, there is a moment when "[t]he spectacle maker themselves have become a spectacle by revealing another layer of gazes drawn to the filmmaking scene. The unusual sequence leaves more room for interpretation when this witnessing audience is running off the frame to escape the camera's eyes, thus resisting to become a spectacle."<sup>207</sup> And Tom Gunning described these "transitory states" of escape as "a sublime moment."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Tom Gunning calls the early cinematic mode of presentation that is distinguished from narrative-driven fiction film as the cinema of attractions. Including frontal tableaux and return gazes, the cinema of attractions pursued an exhibitionist's approach in providing the experience of cinema.

<sup>207</sup> Gunning, "The Whole World within Reach," 39-40.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.



**Figure 9. Burton Holmes surrounded by a gawking crowd,** Undated Photograph, *Source: E. Burton Holmes, Burton Holmes Travelogues* vol. 10. *Seoul — The Capital of Korea, Japan—The Country, Japan—The Cities* (Chicago: Travelogue Bureau, 1920), 75.

Like in the reverse shot sequence of an Edison film, Burton Holmes left several photographs featuring himself with a camera in the captured frame (See Figure 9). Unlike the Edison film, the camera movement does not pivot here, as this is a still shot taken from another camera, which was seemingly set up right across from him. Interestingly, this photograph renders not only the filmmaker but also his camera a spectacle. With two cameras concurrently set up at the scene, there is a natural confusion in the eyes of the witnessing crowd, who do not know where to return their gazes accordingly. While most of them are looking back at the camera standing off the frame, some are looking at the traveler who deliberately composed this self-reflexive arrangement. By foregrounding the camera at the expense of privileged invisibility, Burton Holmes seems to be literally staging the machine's power.

However, unlike the Edison film that Tom Gunning finds an accidental effect of return gaze through which a reversion between seer and seen occurs, the way in which Burton Holmes presents himself and the camera in this photograph is far from being sublime. Neatly framed in perspective, as in landscape paintings, it is hard to find any sense of discomfort interrupting the viewer's immersion into the diegetic world in the image. On the contrary, the well-arranged composition seems to generate soothing pleasure similar to that of the picturesque. By showing off the power of the visual machine as "camera as celebrity," and presenting himself as the one who is entitled to control the power of the machine, the presence of Burton Holmes in this picture rather serves to invite western audiences' voyeuristic identification than interrupt it.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to turn to another interesting sequence that had documented the moment of encounter in the sublime way. The opening scene of *Korea* (1912) contains a brief moment where the bodily trace of the filmmaker was accidentally inscribed into the film: the filmmaker's hand enters from the left side of the frame. The unidentified filmmaker seems to be demonstrating the way to salute, using his hand to direct the individual to be filmed. After gesturing the specific hand pose that he wanted the individual to make for the camera, the hand quickly disappears from the frame. Two other men are standing in the background, witnessing the whole scene of filming, one of whom makes a half smile and has a curious look on his face. No doubt, the filmmaker who is adjusting the pose would have been a spectacle in the eyes of these native people (See Figure 10).

As this is a moment that passes by so quickly, it is hard to notice unless viewers pay very careful attention. However, this is a rare snapshot that speaks to the moment of

physical contact between seer and seen, because the corporeal presence of the filmmaker — his hand — is revealed in the frame. In a sense, this is a reversion of scopic politics contrasted from that of the scene in the Edison film in which the spectacle maker who used to stand outframe intruded into the frame. In this way, the fetishistic desire to appropriate native people as types, and therefore to make them picturesque cannot but be significantly challenged as the person who used to project the gaze is alternately demoted to a spectacle by garnering the return gazes.

Just in the way that Tom Gunning attempted to attribute the sublimity to the moment when the spectator resists remaining as a picture, I would like to call this sequence “a sublime moment” in which an indexical trace of the historic encounter is directly inscribed in the materiality of the image. As Brian Larkin suggests, technologies have “autonomous power” beyond the intention of their sponsors’ control and this is why “how technology exists and makes meaning” can be determined when considering social and historical context surround its inhabitation.<sup>209</sup> To be sure, the intrusion of the filmmaker’s hand as such might not have been an intended consequence. Nevertheless, it is the indexicality of the traces of his hand within the frame that bears witness to the historical moment of the technological and physical contact between seer and seen.

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<sup>209</sup> Larkin, 4.



**Figure 10. Frames enlargements, *Korea* (1912)**

As marvelous spectacles that piqued people's geographical curiosity for the world and travel, travel films played an integral part in the early phase of Korean film history. As I will discuss in the following chapter, it did not take very long for those who used to stare back at the Westerner's camera to begin to form spectatorship, to consume the Western-made travelogues on a regular basis, and to use the technology for their own representation. Not only as a "rational amusement" for enlightenment, but also as a powerful vehicle for national or imperial propaganda, travel films in Korea intersected with colonial politics, technology, knowledge, and visibility during the politically turbulent period from the turn of the century to the colonial period. In this process of technology transfer, a variety of locales and scenery in Korea were newly constructed, domesticated, and conjured up as national or imperial landscapes.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### An Archeology of Sublime Landscapes: Nationalist Representations of Travel, Enlightenment, and Technology

The sea – a soaring mountain –  
Lashes and crushes mighty cliffs of rock  
Those flimsy things, what are they to me?  
“know ye my power?” The sea lashes  
Threateningly, it breaks, it crushes  
Ch’oe Nam-sŏn, “From the Sea to Youth” (*Hae egeasŏ sonyŏn ege*)<sup>210</sup>

When the sublime is experienced as a community, it functions as shared  
emotion for social cohesion like religion  
David Nye, *American Technological Sublime*

As I discussed in the previous chapter, travel films that had dominated in the West also proliferated in the early cinema period in Korea. Various foreign images, including imposing skyscrapers in metropolises, scenic views taken in the Alps, Niagara Falls, and India, and even bullfighting in Spain were brought to Korea and screened at the emergent commercial movie houses in rapidly urbanizing Seoul. As a wondrous attraction imported from the West, the influx of various travel representations tremendously expanded the perceptual horizon of scientific geography, which enabled situating the place of Korea within a global framework. Not long after a couple of western cameramen stopped over and captured the changing face of Korea, those native people in Korea who used to constitute an exotic spectacle in the eyes of Western audiences, in turn, began to appreciate foreign images mediated by the same Western technology that had previously

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<sup>210</sup> The translation is that of Peter H. Lee. For a full text of the poem, see Peter H. Lee, *Korean Literature: Topics and Themes* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1965), 101-102.

attempted to capture them visually. The difference was that it was the lure of “civilization,” not the “exotic” that fascinated the curiosity of these “primitive people.”

At a time of transition from a premodern dynasty to a modern nation-state, the most significant discursive field in many areas of Korean society was enlightenment. The new visual medium’s representation of travel, which was not only entertaining but also educational, resonated well with this *zeitgeist* of the time. As a powerful vehicle for change, the circulation and production of travel films were easily conjoined with competing political agendas in a non-Western context. On the one hand, the popular consumption of Western travelogues in Korea’s Seoul, which had been maintaining a long-standing policy of seclusion, introduced unprecedented opportunities for viewers in Korea to be exposed to foreign sceneries. No wonder the grand depiction the Western civilization in these travel films, despite their mechanized form, helped not only expand geographic knowledge about the world but also educate them to acquire the Social Darwinist ideology.

On the other hand, once this Western technology of visibility was available for use for their own representation a decade after its introduction, travel representations became an effective tool for enlightenment. It was the same potential of a new medium that could visually embrace other cultures to one’s advantage that fascinated both nationalists and colonialist alike in Korea. As a way of forging new forms of subjectivities required for their respective political projects — whether it be enlightenment or colonization, both nationalists and colonialists began to mobilize the visual technology for representing domestic events and landscapes. As a result, various places and locales in Korea began to be newly constructed, domesticated, and conjured up as national or imperial landscapes,

departing from traditional concepts of space. To examine this process of technological indigenization in which non-Westerners who were once the passive objects of the spectacle came to be transformed into an active subject who began to use the visual technology for the nation's self-representation, one must ask the followings questions: What were the sites that had been selected and granted with new interpretations and how are they different from the places depicted in the previous travelogues made by the two Westerners? What made them into a meaningful object of representation — that is, landscape? What technical and aesthetic processes were mobilized in this process? And how did these spatial representations serve as a technique to create homogeneous and integrated national or imperial identity? These are questions that will be explored in the below.

Paying attention to the sublime aesthetics implicated not only with representations of technology but also with representations of landscape, my approaches in deploying the sublime is two folds. In line with previous chapters, on the one hand, this chapter examines how the “landscapes” manufactured through cinematic or precinematic technology for the first time in Korea also strived to showcase technology as an embodiment of wonder and awe of the modern world. As a means of displaying the workings of power — both of technology and politics, representations of modern technology played an integral part for both nationalists and colonialists in constructing a new identity through landscapes. On the other hand, I show that the enduring appeal of the technological sublime was simultaneously accompanied by a tendency to discover national views through embracing the aestheticized images of the natural world. Whereas the increased exposures to the Western civilizations expanded Korean's geographical



imagination to the world, the extension of transportation and the institutionalization of tourism, in turn, helped them to reappropriate actual landscapes of their own; the railroad, in particular, opened up even the scenic views in the countrysides to appropriation as landscape. In this process that can be called as “the discovery of landscape,” in the words of Kojin Kratani, romantic representations of idealized and pastoral scenery contributed to the edification of national consciousness through enhancing the sense of belonging to the land.

Having this interaction between technology and landscape and their edifying effects in relation to the imperatives of the enlightenment in mind, this chapter maps out three precinematic and cinematic instances to see how various representations of travel, enlightenment, and technology constituted new landscapes in colonial Korea. To begin with, I start with looking at how travel was visually promoted as a window to the world and a vehicle of education in the enlightenment project of the Korean nationalist intellectual, Ch’oe Nam-sŏn, and in the vigorous consumption of Western-made travel films by Korean audiences. Although Ch’oe did not have recourse to film technology, the way in which he foregrounded visuality in his magazines and songs are worth noting as a foreshadowing of the coming of cinematic vision. Focusing on his emphasis on a train journey for writing travel songs, in particular, I contend that his travel writings might have exerted a similar effect on the emergent Korean film spectatorship, which is comparable to virtual travel experiences of the earliest travelogues that had been consumed by Western audiences.

Following this, I examine how cinematic representations of travel were also mobilized for colonial governance. Not only as a tool for edifying youth, in the case of

Ch'oe Nam-sŏn, but also as colonial propaganda, both nationalist and colonialist, had recourse to early cinematic technology for their respective purposes. By looking at the first Resident-General of Korea, Itō Hirobumi's pioneering use of motion-picture that strategically featured the Korean royal family, the sublime dimension of Itō's techno-politics in showcasing power and modernity will be examined.

For the rest of the chapter, I move to discuss the unique way in which technology was aestheticized as a spectacle in a hybrid genre called the chain drama (*yŏnswaegŭk*) that inserted cinematic elements for theatrical performances. Despite its technical innovation that could finally incorporate film technology for the representation of Korean domestic landscapes, chain dramas have been neglected or discussed at best only as a precursor to the completed form of nascent Korean cinema in the existing film history. Nevertheless, I show that chain drama serves as a perfect example of a technological complex, as mentioned above, in its strategic and attentive treatment of technology, in which not only cinematography but also other cutting-edge technologies, such as electricity and various means of transportation, were presented as objects of attraction.

### **Around the World in Sixty-Three Pages: Representations on Travel and Transportations in the Discourses of Ch'oe Nam-sŏn**

Ch'oe Nam-sŏn, a leading Korean intellectual devoted to Patriotic Enlightenment Movement (*Aeguk gaemong undong*) for the first half of the twentieth century, has been known for his emphasis on travel as a pedagogic tool for enlightenment, particularly for the younger generations.<sup>211</sup> To better understand Ch'oe's extraordinary awareness of the

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<sup>211</sup> Having been raised in a liberal middle-class family who were favorable for the emergent Enlightenment thought (*Kaehwa sasang*), Ch'oe, as a child of keen intellect, was anxious to acquire new knowledge coming from the West since childhood. During his early career he went

edifying role of travel, however, one should start from looking at his earliest career as a publisher and writer for the magazines that he first launched at the age of eighteen. Indeed, Ch'oe's devotion to enlightening the nation cannot be discussed without mentioning the two magazines that he published after he returned from his study in Japan and whose contribution was significant to the development of modern Korean journalism and literature.<sup>212</sup> From a conviction that modern print media can serve the younger generation, in 1908 Ch'oe published the inaugural issue of *Sonyŏn*, whose meaning is *Youth* (1908-1911), one of the earliest general magazines in Korea. Although the Japanese colonial authority forced *Sonyŏn* to discontinue by in 1911, his endeavor to publish modern magazines did not cease as he began to issue another magazine, *Ch'ŏngch'un* (1914-1918) in 1914.

What characterized the overall tone of the magazine's objectivity was Ch'oe's unique global awareness, which pointed out the interconnectedness of the world as a network in which one country cannot stand alone, as it would be inevitably and organically affected by others. In an article titled, "The Necessity of Knowledge of the World [*Segyejŏk chisik ūi p'iryŏ*]," for example, Ch'oe pointed out that salt of the Mediterranean Sea could reach Inchŏn harbor, the air coming from Siberia could travel to

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to Japan twice to study advanced western civilization — first on government scholarship and second on his own expense. Although his two stays in Japan were brief as he had to quit pursuing institutional education not long after, it is notable that Ch'oe initially chose to major in at the prestigious Waseda university historical geography. For his life background, see Chizuko Allen, "Ch'oe Nam-sŏn's Youth Magazines and Message of a Global Korea in Early Twentieth Century," *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 14-2 (2014), 195-217 and Ryu Sihyun, *Ch'oe Nam-sŏn yŏngu: cheguk ūi kŭndae wa singminji munhwa (A Study on Ch'oe Nam-sŏn: Modernity of the Empire and Culture in a Colony)*, (Seoul, Korea: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 2009).

<sup>212</sup> According to Chizuko Allen, Ch'oe's engagement with the magazine enterprise was incubated during his stay in Japan where he had been fascinated by "the flourishing Japanese publications." Among others, what struck him most was diverse kinds of magazines targeting at middle school and elementary school children. See Allen, 198-199.

Mt. Paektu, the street of Chongno, Seoul's most bustling thoroughfare, could be covered with the sand blowing in from the Sahara. In addition to geographic linkages, what is interesting is that Ch'oe had an understanding of the global scale of the capitalist exchange system; he went further to point out that raw resources such as zinc in Poland are circulated to manufacture brassware as a commodity in Korea and it was thanks to the woolen textile industry in Manchester that Korean gentlemen could wear winter coats. Such interconnectedness required the acquisition of knowledge of the world on the part of Koreans.<sup>213</sup>

Most of all, what interested Ch'oe was learning scientific knowledge from advanced Western civilization. Starting from the ambitious inauguration issue, *Sonyŏn* introduced "the best in Western civilization from its history, geography, literature, natural sciences, and technology."<sup>214</sup> Among others, his abiding exploration of Korea's transition to a modern-nation state can be best envisioned in accordance with his growing interest in world geography. As a science or a representative system, geography occupied a significant status within his enlightenment project. Unlike Confucian geomantic traditions in conceiving domestic spaces and the Chinese-centered world order, geography, to Ch'oe, is not only science based on a modern understanding of spaces but also an epistemic system with which the political concepts relating to modern nation-states such as territories, borders, and sovereignty can be spatially defined.<sup>215</sup> His

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<sup>213</sup> "Segyejŏk chisik ūi p'iryŏ (Necessity of knowledge of the world)," *Sonyŏn* 5 (May 1909), 4.

<sup>214</sup> Allen, 202.

<sup>215</sup> Regarding Ch'oe interests in geography and its implication with the rise of nationalism, see Ryu Si Hyun, "Hanmal iljejo hanbando e kwanhan chirijŏk insik (The Geographical Discourse on the Korean Peninsula Between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century)," *Hanguksa yŏn'gu* 137 (2007), 269-294 and Hong Sun Ae, "Kŭndae chŏgi chirihak ūi suyong kwa kukt'o yŏhaeng ūi nolli: Sonyŏnŭl chungsimŭiro (The Reception of Geography in early Modern Korea and the Logic of National Travel: Focusing on Sonyŏn)," *Hanjung inmunhak yŏn'gu* 34 (2011), 33-53.

ultimate goal, as an enlightened social reformer, was to forge a new subjectivity by instilling in the younger generation a patriotic, adventurous, and inspired consciousness comparable to the overwhelming vibrancy of the sea, as envisioned in the excerpt of his monumental poem, “From the Sea to Youths.” As a window to the greater world, the sublime imagination on the roaring sea must have symbolized to him the newly defined place of Korea and its untiring spirit for a change.

Given the interconnectedness between the hegemonic world system and the reverberation of modern nation-states, Ch’oe’s global orientation cannot be discussed without considering his simultaneous attention to the national. This is why Ch’oe also emphasized reinterpreting Korean tradition and history while asserting the importance of knowledge of the world. In this regard, one narrative pattern appeared in editing the magazines is worth of noting; the juxtaposition of great historical figures in the West, most of whom were considered national heroes, with equivalent national heroes from Korean history. In a similar fashion that Peter the Great in Russia, Napoleon in France, Garibaldi in Italy, and Benjamin Franklyn in the States were highlighted, the Korean examples included General Ŭljimundŏk who defeated the invasion of Sui China at Salsu Battle in 612 A.D. and General Yi Sunsin who fought against the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592.<sup>216</sup>

Not only as a publisher but also as a writer, Ch’oe contributed a lot to the development of modern Korean literature. Particularly, Ch’oe’s use of the Korean vernacular was pioneering to modernize poetry written in classical Chinese; he has been known to have written the first free-style verse written in the Korean vernacular, “From

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<sup>216</sup> See the inaugural issue of *Sonyŏn*.

Sea to Youths” in the inaugural issue of *Sonyŏn*. For his pioneering publishing ventures targeted at edifying youths, Ch’oe himself became a principal author in charge of contributing most of the contents to the magazines. While writing and translating numerous articles, essays, poems, and travelogues in Korean vernacular, the subject that his writings embraced were not confined to any single discipline; a wide spectrum of subjects covered in the magazines included literature, history, mythology, archeology, anthropology, and natural sciences.<sup>217</sup> Given the popularity and influences that Ch’oe’s magazines exerted on the emerging print capitalism in Korea and his use of the Korean vernacular, his belief in the benefits of the rising print media, in turn, played a leading role to arouse national consciousness, as many studies have shown to be the case in other places, including the monumental work of Benedict Anderson.<sup>218</sup>

Among his multilateral endeavors to enlighten the youth, what was central to Ch’oe’s discourses was his emphasis on travel and geographic presentation of landscapes. In an imaginary travel writing published in the inaugural issue of *Sonyŏn*, for example, Ch’oe asserted that travel is “the true source of knowledge,” and strongly recommended viewers to spend more time on travel.<sup>219</sup> While staging a fifteen-year-old boy who received a modern education as a fictitious character, Ch’oe speaks for the importance of firsthand experience of travel; the imaginary narrator, as Ch’oe’s proxy, expresses that what propelled him to set out on a journey was his dissatisfaction with the classroom knowledge that had been taught only by way of maps and pictures. Instead, he preferred

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<sup>217</sup> Allen, 196.

<sup>218</sup> For the role of print media in the formation of nationalism, see Benedict Anderson.

<sup>219</sup> “K’waesonyŏn segye juyu sibo (A world journey of an adventurous boy),” *Sonyŏn* 4 (November 1908), 77.

to tread the Siberia and see the Alps in person.<sup>220</sup> Reminiscent of the edifying function in the European tradition of Grand Tours, Ch'oe considered travel to be a powerful vehicle to enlighten the youth into more adventurous and enterprising modern subjects.

Interestingly, let alone as a means of self-cultivation, he went further to mention that travel experiences can even invigorate the entire nation and break it away from its long-standing inertia.<sup>221</sup>

While striving to expand geographic knowledge of the world, the educational virtue of travel in his assertion was connected to self-cultivation. According to another magazine article titled “Cultivation and Mountain Hiking [Suyang gwa sanhaeng],” the utility of travel lay in its function as a means of discipline.<sup>222</sup> As is well-known, the self-strengthening movement was a principal campaign pursued by the Patriotic and Enlightenment Movement thinkers, including Ch'oe, that aimed at modernization in a more spontaneous way.<sup>223</sup> In line with this reformatory imperative on a national scale, moral development on an individual level was highlighted as well. It is in this vein that Ch'oe asserted the virtue of travel in relation to self-cultivation. According to him, “more hardship means greater cultivation,” as that is how we can discipline and cultivate our mind and body.<sup>224</sup> Therefore, “travel truly fulfills all the required conditions for self-

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>222</sup> Ch'oe Nam-sŏn, “Suyang gwa sanhaeng (Cultivation and Mountain Hiking),” *Ch'ŏngch'un* 9 (July 1917), 5-6.

<sup>223</sup> For the role of travel in relation to the genealogy of discourses on self-discipline and cultivation within the enlightenment campaign, see Hong Sun Ae, “Hanguk kŭndae yŏhaeng damnon ūi hyŏngsŏng gwa suyangnon ūi silch'ŏnjŏk nolli (The Construction of Discourses on Modern Travel in Korea and the Practice of Cultivation)” *Hyŏndae sosŏl yŏngu* 48 (2011), 347-376.

<sup>224</sup> Ch'oe, “Suyang gwa sanhaeng (Cultivation and Mountain Hiking),” 8.

discipline,” through which we should overcome crisis and face deficiency.<sup>225</sup> He went further to mention that “those who have been disciplined by travel would have foundations as hard as red-hot metal tempered by fire.”<sup>226</sup>

In addition to his interests in world geography and rather instructive columns in the magazines, Ch’oe’s promotion of travel was also manifest with his writing of multi-stanza songs called *ch’ang-ga*.<sup>227</sup> Including “Song of Hanyang, the Capital of Korea” [*Hanyang-ga*], “Song of Seoul-Pusan Railways” [*Kyōngbu ch’ōldo norae*], and “Song of Circumnavigation of the World” [*Segye iljuga*], Ch’oe wrote numerous travel-themed songs and published them on his magazines. Although they were still imaginary, as in the column that featured a fictitious fifteen-year-old boy’s setting out on a world journey in the inauguration issue of *Sonyōn*, Ch’oe’s itineraries in these songs embraced both domestic and international sightseeing.

Let us take the example of “Song of Circumnavigation of the World” to examine how Ch’oe envisioned the world in the form of virtual travel. Composed of sixty-three pages of well-crafted verses containing detailed historical and geographical facts almost like an encyclopedia of world geography, the song is literally about the round-the-world journey that covers all the continents and the oceans on the globe. The journey begins from Seoul’s train terminal at the South Gate goes north via Manchuria and Siberia to Europe. After exploring various European cities and their rich history, including Paris,

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>227</sup> As one of the interim literary formats manifest during the transition from classical poetry to new style of modern poems written in Korean vernacular, *Ch’ang-ga* refers to lyrics written to be sung to the Western style melody. As a vehicle for spreading the reformist’s thoughts in the form of a song, the leading Enlightenment thinkers at that time including Ch’oe Nam-sōn, Yi Kwang-su, and Yun Ch’i-ho were the major creators for this genre.



London, Budapest, Brussel, and Amsterdam, the journey continues to Africa and the New Continent. From San Francisco, the narrator crosses the Pacific on a steamship to westbound. Seven days after the narrator sets off from San Francisco, he arrives at the Hawaiian Islands where he meets his fellow Koreans, who had immigrated and successfully settled down there. From there, the narrator proceeds to Japan's Shimonoseki via Yokohama before taking the liner to Pusan and coming back home.<sup>228</sup>

Indeed, the itineraries that the imaginary narrator takes in this song — including the Siberian intercontinental railways — reminds us of the routes that brought the American traveler, E. Burton Holmes, to Korea a decade before, as discussed in the previous chapter. Following similar routes that enabled the earliest encounter with the broader world among Koreans, Ch'oe provides a reversed experience. In a less than a decade since Burton Holmes visited Korea and furnished virtual travel experiences to audiences in the West, Ch'oe was now encouraging his readers in Korea to go out to the world, while also helping them to visualize the itineraries by way of a surrogate, ersatz traveler.

Reminiscent of the fact that his endeavor to introduce Western knowledge had been simultaneously accompanied by an interest in the national, it comes as no surprise that some portion of Ch'oe's travel songs were about domestic trips. As seen in "Song of Seoul-Pusan Railways [*Kyŏngbu ch'ŏldo norae*]," in which he enumerates each stop on the Seoul-Pusan Railway lines and describes their local characteristics and histories, Ch'oe also paid attention to depicting national landscapes.<sup>229</sup> As much as he was

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<sup>228</sup> Pak Sŭl-gi ed., *Ch'oe Nam-sŏn hangukhak ch'ongsŏ 12: Siga munhak* (The Complete Work of Ch'oe Nam-sŏn 12: Poetry), (Seoul, Korea: Kyŏngin munhwasa, 2013), 123-186.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-122.

advocating an adventurous mind and exhibiting a global orientation, he was equally obsessed with representing national spaces. To be sure, depicting travel on a newly extended railway as such would have been a useful way to demarcate the boundary of a modern nation-state vis-à-vis the exteriority of the nation, just like the extension of railways succeeded in consolidating previously fragmented locales and provinces into a homogenous territory. In a similar way that depicted the world tour in “Song of Circumnavigation of the World,” “Song of Seoul-Pusan Railways” is nothing other than a eulogy, not only to forms of travel that were finally made possible thanks to the railways but also to the national landscapes that were thus discovered.

What is interesting about his travel writings is the ways in which modern transportation, and railways, in particular, are represented with a focus on their capacity to annihilate time and space. In fact, one conspicuous narrative pattern that was frequently deployed in his travel songs is depicting journeys on trains. In addition to the trans-Siberian railways in “Song of Circumnavigation of the World” and the Seoul-Pusan railways in “Song of Seoul-Pusan Railways,” in his other travel writings, such as “Trip to the Southeastern region [*Kyonam honggwa*]” and “Trip to Pyongyang [*P’yŏngyanghaeng*],” he deploys similar narrative patterns in depicting journeys on trains. Furthermore, while striving to provide extensive geographic and historical information to readers, what endows the imaginary travel narrative with a sense of realism is his depictions of sensorial perceptions attached to trips on railways and steamships. For example, the first two stanzas of “Song of Seoul-Pusan Railways” are full of expressions that exalt the audiovisual shocks associated with the train’s

“wondrous” capacity to “traverse half of the country only in a day.”<sup>230</sup> Ch’oe describes the departure of a train as follows: “With a whistle as loud as thunder, the train sets off from the South Gate. As the speed of the train is as swift as the wind, even a bird with wings will not be able to catch up with it.”<sup>231</sup> Moreover, pointing out the heterogenous composition of passengers in the cabin, without distinction of age and ethnicity, the narrator feels like “being in an entirely different world” on the train.<sup>232</sup> As with the jargon “passenger-spectator,” Charles Musser’s term describing the emergence of new perceptions in modern times, to Ch’oe, the train as an emblem of modernity might have been conceived as the same tool as print media in that both of them could effectively serve the construction of a new subjectivity.<sup>233</sup>

Returning to the popularity of travel films, the reception of foreign-produced travel films in turn-of-the-century Korea should be understood in line with this aspiration for enlightenment, together with the burgeoning of national consciousness. In a few years after a handful of foreign filmmakers stopped in Korea with brand-new film technology, various travel films and foreign images gained more and more popularity in the earliest cinematic repertoires in Korea. Given the long-held policy of national seclusion, the variety of foreign sceneries that were actually shown in Korea is quite remarkable. To name a few, they include: landscapes of the Southern Marseille, launching ceremonies of Italian ships, soldiers of Bulgaria, a Spanish-style wedding ceremony, a park in Italy, snow-covered mountains in the Alps, cityscapes in Rome, the scenery of Sicily, Niagara

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.,122.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.,100.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.,100.

<sup>233</sup> Charles Musser, *Before Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 260-265.

Falls, a fishing scene at the Norwegian shore, a landscape in Wisconsin, and more.<sup>234</sup> As a newspaper advertisement asserted, motion-picture screenings would provide great opportunities to see advanced civilizations in the world through which general audiences could have fun going on a world tour “without stepping outside of the city gate.”<sup>235</sup> As an extension of education, representations of travel served as a surrogate experience, because most of the ordinary viewers who, in reality, had never had a chance to cross the border could access vicarious gratification.

Nevertheless, the context of reception of the early travel films cannot but diverge from that of the West. While the Western gaze attempted to capture the rest of the world by aestheticizing inferior others, travel representations consumed in turn-of-the-century Korea were replete with flamboyant showcases of advanced Western civilizations. What would have this lure of civilization on the screen meant to the historic audience in Korea? As discussed in previous chapters, the quintessence of early cinema’s visual shock in the non-Western context was comparable to that of the colonial sublime that had to be experienced vis-à-vis the superiority of others. In this sense, a true didactic function of travel and watching representations of travel lay in making civilizational unevenness visible, thus calling attention to an urgent need for self-strengthening the nation in order to survive in a world governed by Social Darwinist notions of competition.

Ch’oe’s pioneering contribution to the discovery of national landscapes through writing travel songs can be better understood in this regard. Despite the shared interest in preaching the educational dimension of travel, his depictions on the domestic journeys

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<sup>234</sup> *Taehan Maeil Sinbo*, March 31, 1912, July 3, 1912, April 19, 1913, July 1, 1913, July 5, 1913, August 16, 1913, October 17, 1913, and May 2, 1914.

<sup>235</sup> *Taehan Maeil Sinbo*, June 11, 1911.

significantly differ from that of “Song of Circumnavigation of the World.” While “Song of Circumnavigation of the World” is providing a virtual travel experience — imaginarily mediated by a surrogate traveler’s point of view, his domestic itineraries in other travel songs convey a more immediate sense of travel. It is because his travel songs with domestic destinations are constructed based on real geography where he charts the names of each railway station on the newly built Seoul-Busan Railways, which is followed by a short report of topographic and historical information about the region. In the preface of another travel song that he published later in 1928, “Song of Excursion of Chosŏn [*Chosŏn yuram-ga* ],” Ch’oe expresses his goal for creating these songs quite bluntly: “By blending nature and culture into a one work of song,” what he wants to do is “to sing about Chosŏn,” “a land with five thousand years’ of history and complicated geographical features stretched to three thousand leagues.”<sup>236</sup> In this way, Ch’oe seems to make an epistemic inversion by replacing virtual and imaginative geography onto the world with an actual journey to national spaces as a means of creating the experience of the real.

In the decade following the first railways connecting Seoul to Inch’ŏn, the entirety of the Korean peninsula was connected to Manchuria from Pusan, the largest port city accessible to the south via Kyŏngsŏng.<sup>237</sup> As studies of colonial modernity have

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<sup>236</sup> Pak, 190-191.

<sup>237</sup> Since the first railways from Seoul to Inchŏn had been completed in 1899, the Seoul-Pusan railways and the Seoul-Sinŭiju line were completed in 1905 and 1906 respectively. With the construction of the steel bridge over the Yalu river in 1911, the entire railway system traversing the Korean peninsula from Pusan to Manchuria via Sinŭiju was completed through which an express train leaving the Korea’s South Gate terminal to Changchun in Manchuria operated three times a week. For a further historical account on the completion of the railways and the controversies surrounding its ambivalent function for both exploitation and development during the colonial era, see Chŏng T’ae Hŏn, *Hanbando ch’ŏldo ŭi chŏngch’igyŏngjehak: Ilje ŭi ch’imnyak t’ongno esŏ tongbuga kongdongch’e ŭi p’yŏnghwa ch’ŏldoro* (The Political Economy

shown, the extension of transportation infrastructure had an ambivalent operation, particularly in the colonial context; while the increased mobility greatly helped a pre-modern country's transition to a modern nation-state, it also facilitated foreign invasion both politically and economically.<sup>238</sup> Railways in Korea emerged and developed following the same pattern: on the one hand, it expanded all sorts of circulation. Together with the development of communication technologies, railway networks played an important role in forging a centralized system of governance. On the other hand, since the first railway tracks erected by American know-how and imported materials, the completion of an integrated railway system that penetrated the entirety of the Korean peninsula was an outcome of Japan's strategic planning to make forays into Manchuria. It was following these tracks of extended railways that film technology in Korea continued to travel and produce representations of domestic landscapes. Having this in mind, the below examines various kinds of travel films in the broad sense, created not only as a form of entertainment but also as a pedagogic vehicle.

### **Travel to Integration: Itō Hirobumi's Travel Films as the Root of Culture Film**

The propagandistic mobilization of a technological complex formed by transportation, cinema, and landscapes implicated with power was manifest first by Itō Hirobumi, the first Resident-General in Korea, through his use of motion-pictures as part of colonial governance. Having been known to have previously experimented on the potential of the brand-new visual medium as a tool for political propaganda during his

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of the Korean Railways: From the exploit route of the Japanese Empire to the Peace Road of the East Asian Community) (Seoul, Korea: Tosō Ch'ulpan Sōnin, 2017).

<sup>238</sup> Hwang, 120.

rule over Taiwan, Itō Hirobumi was a pioneer in utilizing technology for political purposes.<sup>239</sup> Keeping in line with the successful use of film technology in Taiwan, as the first Resident-General of Korea he attempted to take advantage of motion-pictures even more aggressively, to the extent that his office produced films of their own through which he could promote colonial ideologies more efficiently. For the first a few years since Japan officially made Korea its protectorate in 1905 and began to interfere domestic affairs and international relations of the Great Han Empire of Korea, there were two urgent political imperatives for Itō; On the one hand, he wanted to pacify anti-Japanese sentiments and tumult among Koreans by promoting assimilation. On the other hand, he was also required to reassure apprehension about Japan's colonial administration in Korea that began to arise in Japan proper, due to the increasing public unrest in Korea.<sup>240</sup>

For this purpose, what was central to Itō's use of motion-pictures was to make use of the Korean monarch, despite his inertia as a puppet regime, as a symbol of harmony between the two countries. Based on the lesson of the utility of motion-pictures that he learned in Taiwan, Itō invited cameramen from the proliferating film production scene in Japan proper, such as Yoshizawa Company and Yokota Company, and sponsored them to produce films about Korea. Many of these films consisted of representations of the

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<sup>239</sup> According to Bok Hwa Mo's in-depth study on Itō Hirobumi's use of motion-picture for his political agenda, Ito Hirobumi was said to have invited a Japanese *benshi* and itinerant live performer to Taiwan and made him organize travelling film screenings where several films including war actuality films imported from Britain were shown as a way of defusing anti-Japanese sentiments among Taiwanese aborigines as well as entertaining the Japanese troops. See Bok Hwan Mo, "*Han'guk yŏnghwa ch'ogŭ issŏsŏ ito hirobumi ŭi yŏnghwa iyong e kwanhan yŏn'gu* (A study on Ito Hirobumi's Use of Movies in the Early Stage of Korea Film History)," *Yŏnghwa yŏngu* 28 (2006), 253-254.

<sup>240</sup> What triggered the rampancy of anti-Japanese rebellions around this time was the failed secret mission to the Hague World Peace Conference. Three secret emissaries were sent to the Hague World Peace Conference by Kojong to inform the world the injustice of the 1905 protectorate treaty with Japan and plead for independence. As their participation was denied and therefore, the secret mission ended in failure, Kojong was forced to be abdicated by Japan.

Korean royal family, including visual depictions on the progresses of the monarch himself and the everyday life and raising of the royal prince. What is interesting with these rather propagandistic and political films is the way in which the travel motif — either in the monarch's processions or the royal prince's trip to Japan — had been constantly called to attention. In a similar fashion as Ch'oe Nam-sŏn, as a nationalist, promoted travel as a vehicle for the nation's enlightenment project, the same technological complex among cinema, travel, and transportation was mobilized for the rather opposite political enterprise—that of colonialism. Paying attention to the technopolitics of a Japanese colonist in producing representations about Korea and the royal family as a means of showcasing his political leverage, the below is an examination of the earliest travelogues, in its broad sense, that were produced not from the Western traveler's perspective but still from an observer's perspective. I show that these travel films, as the prototype of colonial propaganda genre that would prosper even more later in accordance with the intensification of colonial dominion, share certain aesthetics with the Western mode of vision in appropriating Others by turning them into a political spectacle.

The Japanese production of films depicting Korean customs and the activities of Residency-General in Korea began in earnest when Yokota Company based in Kyoto sought to expand their overseas operation in Korea.<sup>241</sup> As a newspaper article attests, it was in *Ihyŏn* (泥岷, a.k.a. *chin'gogae*), the largest Japanese settler's district in Seoul that a Korean branch office of Yokota Company was opened in 1908.<sup>242</sup> In addition to

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>242</sup> *Hwangsŏng Sinmun*, March 28, 1908.



organizing screenings for Japanese settlers, the camera crew dispatched from Yokota Company engaged film production in Korea under the auspices of the Japanese Residency-General in Korea and thus collected footage was brought back to Japan and released under the title of *Circumnavigation of Korea* (*Han 'guk ilju*, 韓國一週).<sup>243</sup>

Despite ideological intent in promoting the message of assimilation between Japan and Korea, the ostensible reason for producing this film seemed to enhance geographical and cultural understanding of Korea in the form of a travel film replete with ethnographic curiosity for another culture. Therefore, except for a certain number of promotional scenes portraying Itō's public and private affairs, the rest of the film was filled with scenery, customs, and historic sites of Korea. Interestingly, the repertoires included in *Circumnavigation of Korea* are nearly identical with those of the Western travel representations on Korea: As seen in the Burton Holmes travelogue about Korea discussed in the previous chapter, it has been known to have included depictions of trolley cars, palaces and historic monuments or architecture, the South Gate, school-aged children, royal *kisaengs*, and so forth.<sup>244</sup> Despite being disguised as one of the foreign perspective films that had been popularly consumed around that time, it would have been reflective of Itō's political intent. As Bok Hwan Mo's pioneering study of Itō's use of motion-picture pointed out, in foregrounding "serene and ordinary situations of Korea,"

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<sup>243</sup> Bok, 256-257.

<sup>244</sup> Due to the lack of filmic text, there is no way to compare detailed strategies in representing Korea between western and Japanese travelogues. However, the purported contents about *Han 'guk Ilju* (Circumnavigation of Korea) were indicated in an anthology on Japanese film history as follows: A picnic day of the Residency-General, Itō's hand-written letter, offices and mansion of the Residency-General, the Taehan Gate, Tōksu Palace, Namsan Mt. Park, the South Gate, trolleys running in front of the bell tower in Chongno, the Korean emperor's coronation site, the Independence Gate, Inch'ŏn port, islands near Inch'ŏn port, customs of workers in Seoul, *kisaeng*, acrobatics, school age children, and the recording of a riot that took place while the camera team were staying in Korea. Recited from Bok, 257.

what Itō pursued was to avert deliberately political turbulence taking place there, and therefore to “amend the negative perceptions attached to the colonization of Korea in Japan.”<sup>245</sup>

Itō’s endeavor to utilize motion-pictures for his governance of Korea attained eminence in making the Korean royal family more visible to the public. While visually staging the Korean royal house through his production of films about Korea, what he intended can be understood in a two-fold manner: On the one hand, by relying on the authority of the Korean king and royal prince, he could have wanted to showcase his political leverage on the peninsula to those skeptical about Japan’s colonization of Korea in Japan proper (let alone Koreans). In that the Korean royal family was featured in the events that had been meticulously arranged by Itō himself, such as the processions of the King or the royal prince’s journeys to Japan, the authority of the royal family could have been equated with being his proxy who could speak for his highly-calculated political interests. On the other hand, these films can also be seen as comprising the royal movie genre featuring royal family and the related events as an object of filming that had been a prevalent theme for early cinematic repertory.

As Stephen Bottomore’s study has shown, as soon as the earliest film technology was circulated all over the globe, not only were international royal families the first passionate audiences for this new medium who had enjoyed the movies at specially arranged private screenings but “[r]oyals appeared in moving pictures themselves.”<sup>246</sup> Given the medium’s democratizing potential as a cheap amusement that appealed to the

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<sup>245</sup> Bok, 256.

<sup>246</sup> See Stephen Bottomore, “She’s Just Like My Granny! Where’s Her Crown? Monarchs and Movies, 1896-1916,” *Celebrating 1895: The Centenary of Cinema*, John Fullerton ed., (Sydney and London: John Libbey & Company Ltd., 1998), 173.

emergent mass public, as discussed in previous studies, the role of the highest class in accommodating and developing the brand new technology in its earliest days is not a simple question that requires separate scrutiny.<sup>247</sup>

Turn-of-the-century Korea under the monarchical system, albeit on the verge of collapse due to Japanese encroachment, was no exception to this trend. As the episode mentioned in the Introduction shows, the royal family in Korea has been purported to be one of the first audiences who had been exposed to film technology from their encounter with an American traveler, Burton Holmes. Since then, the royal family continued to be the passionate audience who had watched almost every imported film in the name of royal inspection (皇室御覽) prior to their release to the public.<sup>248</sup> At the same time, there is no wonder that their presence on the screen must have been a spectacle that could pique curiosity from audiences. It is in this vein that various rituals related to the royal family, such as coronations, parades, or funerals, had constituted a major theme for early actuality films.<sup>249</sup> Conforming to the ambivalent mode of address of early actuality films, as discussed in Chapter Two, Itō's techno-politics that aimed to turn the Korean monarch and the royal prince into a political spectacle is thus located between political education and sheer entertainment.

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<sup>247</sup> Miriam Hansen's study on the cinematic public sphere is a good example showing this tendency in early cinema scholarship linking the medium's reception to the emergence of working class as spectator. See Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema, and the Transformation of the Public Sphere."

<sup>248</sup> *Taehan Maeil Sinbo*, May 29, 1907, May 30, 1907, June 19, 1907, April 4, 1908, May 10, 1908, June 15, 1909, February 2, 1910. *Hwangsŏng Sinmun*, April 10, 1908, April 15, 1908, and May 10, 1908.

<sup>249</sup> See Stephen Bottomore, "She's Just Like My Granny! Where's Her Crown? Monarchs and Movies, 1896-1916," 173.

The first instance that Itō's propagandistic use of film technology was manifest with the films depicting the everyday activities of the Korean royal prince being taken to Japan. When Sunjong, the last emperor of the Great Han Empire, came to the throne in 1907 after Kojong had been forced to step down, Itō suggested bringing a royal prince of Korea to Japan for his modern education. Despite the nominal cause, the royal prince going to Japan was conceived as politically taking hostage of him, which aroused controversies in the royal family and people in Korea. To cope with possible social unrest in Korea, the royal prince's entire itinerary from Inch'ŏn port to Japan was recorded by the cameramen dispatched from Yokota Company and released to the Korean palace and public a year later; the visual footage included the royal prince's stay at an inn and arrivals to each city where he was cordially received by Japanese people along his journey.<sup>250</sup> A year later, the Yokota Company's footage was screened at Ch'angdŏk palace first and then at Tōksu palace later, in the form of private screening called royal inspection.<sup>251</sup> Without a doubt, presenting the parade of the Korean royal prince surrounded by cheering crowds must have relieved the Korean royal family, especially the Queen, mother of the royal prince and the monarch herself, who had been concerned about their son's safety since the royal prince was taken to Japan.

Representations of the crown prince were also consumed by ordinary people in Korea as a visual spectacle as well, together with other films from the same company. Until Itō was assassinated in Harbin, Manchuria, in 1909, films about the Korean crown prince in Japan and his several tours to Kansai and Hokkaido provinces continued to be

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<sup>250</sup> *Hwangsŏng Sinmun*, April 17, 1908.

<sup>251</sup> *Hwangsŏng Sinmun*, April 10, 1908 and April 14, 1908.

produced and constituted a major repertory in the earliest film programming in Korea.<sup>252</sup> Interestingly, in a sense, these films were reminiscent of the Western travelogues in their form and content. When they were experienced as a collective by the emergent cinemagoers, in particular, these travel films featuring the crown prince might have functioned as a virtual travel experience and generated similar effects as that of watching the Western-made travel films. What was shown on the screen was not only the meticulously staged images of the royal prince. Not only exotic landscapes such as whale hunting, a fishery of the Ainu, and horseracing, but also advanced modern technologies in Japan, including large-scale battleships and newly built bridges, were captured along with the royal prince's itineraries.<sup>253</sup> Nevertheless, as these films were usually screened accompanied by lectures and speeches promoting political messages such as co-prosperity between Japan and Korea, or peace in East Asia, or through enlightenment-driven civic organizations, there was no doubt that the paramount imperative in producing these films was a political one.<sup>254</sup>

Drawing on the lessons gained from portraying the royal prince, Itō attempted to take advantage of motion-picture technology again for domestic politics in Korea by foregrounding Sunjong instead. In 1909, a year before the official annexation of Korea, emulating Meiji emperor's imperial processions, Sunjong embarked on two provincial tours—one to the South and the other to the Northwest — in which he traversed the

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<sup>252</sup> *Hwangsoŋg Sinmun*. March 24, 1908, March 28, 1908, May 10, 1908, June 18, 1908, and July 18, 1908. Also, see Bok, 270. According to Bok Hwan Mo, the film footage that had recorded the royal prince's stay in Japan were brought back to Korea and screened both for the royal family and the public. In case of public screenings, the major distributional channel was the Korean branch of a pro-Japanese civil organization, Patriotic Women's Association (*Aeguk puinhoe*).

<sup>253</sup> Bok, 269.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 258-259.

Korean peninsula following the two newly launched railways lines. Over the three weeks of the royal tour that Itō himself accompanied, Sunjong was met by “government officials and local community leaders” and greeted by “school children waving national flags and shouting *Manse!* (Long Live the Emperor!)”<sup>255</sup>

As Takashi Fujitani has demonstrated, imperial processions “that brought the emperor, his family, and military and civil members of his regime directly before the masses” constituted “[t]he most spectacular state ceremonials of Japan’s modernity.”<sup>256</sup> Likewise, the almost ritualistic parade of the Korean emperor “along freshly cleared boulevards of his daily destination” indeed was a meaningful spectacle that was supposed to showcase his majesty directly in front of the public lined up along the street and make his presence more visible.<sup>257</sup>

At the height of Japan’s informal rule in Korea, right before full annexation, the imperial processions served as “an opportunity to herald the new era of modern Korea” according to Itō’s plot and the co-prosperity between Japan and Korea.<sup>258</sup> As part of showcasing achievements of modernization, “Sunjong’s role was to endorse modern institutions — be it the train, his “Westernized” appearance, or the daily telegrams that enabled the performance of his filial, uxorial, and diplomatic duties to Kojong, his queen, and the Meiji Emperor.”<sup>259</sup> Notably, the two imperial processions intended to present the Korean emperor as a purveyor of modern values. For this ostentatious purpose, modern

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<sup>255</sup> Christine Kim, “Politics and Pageantry in Protectorate Korea (1905-10): The Imperial Progresses of Sunjong,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 68-3 (August 2009), 835.

<sup>256</sup> Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 13.

<sup>257</sup> Kim, 835.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 843.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 843-844.

transportation played a significant role both materially and symbolically. Let alone that his itineraries were made possible following the tracks of the two railways lines — Seoul-Pusan and Seoul-Ŭiju lines. In Pusan, for example, Sunjong had a chance to board on a battleship of the Japanese Imperial Navy where he observed the Japanese army's military drills equipped with cutting-edge military technologies.<sup>260</sup> Above all, the entire journey of the Korean emperor was filmed through deploying the state-of-the-art medium of motion-pictures by hiring the Yokota Company's filming staff. In this sense, what Itō took advantage of was not only the politics of pageantry but also the mechanically reproducible technology of visual representation. As a result, the record of the Korean emperor's provincial tours was released under the title of *Sightseeing of Korea* (*Han'gukkwan*) and screened not only to the royal family in Korea but also to the general public in Korea and Japan.<sup>261</sup>

Itō's pioneering use of motion-pictures for colonial propaganda was inherited by the establishment of the educational mobile film troupe within the Japanese Government-General in Korea in 1920 and its itinerant cinematic practices. As a mouthpiece of the colonial government, mobile film units actively engaged not only with film productions for the publicity of state policies but also with dispatching itinerant film projection units to rural areas.<sup>262</sup> Showing a mix of documentaries, newsreels, and pedagogical dramas, which were typically accompanied by a short lecture, mobile film units traveled to rural

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<sup>260</sup> Kim, 845.

<sup>261</sup> *Taehan Maeil Sinbo*. June 15, 1909.

<sup>262</sup> The commercial practice of itinerant film screening had existed before the GGK set up a department exclusively devoted to promoting colonial propaganda. In parallel with this, the mobile film unit within the GGK not only screened propaganda films while touring to rural areas where the cinematic infrastructures were scarce but also produced several propaganda films on their own. For the cinematic practices of the GGK's mobile film unit, see Dong Hoon Kim, especially Chapter One.

areas lagging behind in keeping up with the rapid pace of modernization in major cities. Although the practice of itinerant cinematic performance may not be a uniquely Korean phenomenon, the political mode of address implicated with the practice characterizes one aspect of colonial cinema in Korea. Not only through mobilizing various travel films but also through traveling film practices, early cinema in Korea served as an infrastructural network vis-à-vis the country's pressing political agendas of enlightenment and progress. Having examined the colonialist's appropriation of the technological complex among earliest film technology, travel, and infrastructural achievements, now I turn to a unique genre called chain drama (*yŏnswaegŭk*) focusing on how modern technology was spectacularized in a cinematic way.

**An Aestheticization of Technology: The Discovery of Vernacular Landscapes in *The Righteous Revenge* (dir. Kim Do-san, 1919)**

Having originated and proliferated in Japan, the chain drama (K. *yŏnswagŭk*, J. *rensageki*) was a transient genre manifest during the transition from stage drama to cinema and became popular also in Korea.<sup>263</sup> It is a hybrid genre because of its unique use of filmed footage as an inserted attraction in the middle of stage performances. While incorporating two heterogenous modes of performance — live theater and cinema — into a single genre, chain drama strived to maintain the same narrative construction by presenting the inter-media transition as smoothly as

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<sup>263</sup> Compared to Japan, chain drama proliferated very briefly in colonial Korea from 1919 to 1922. The transitional genre inevitably declined with the coming of full-blown silent film era beginning from 1923. See Chŏng Jong Hwa, “Yŏnswaegŭk e gwanhan koch'al: Ilbon yŏnswaegŭk yŏngu donghyangŭl kibanŭro (A study on Cinematic Combination Play: By analyzing Japanese research on the combination play),” *Yŏnghwa yŏngu* 74 (2017), 201-202.



possible. This kind of narrative seamlessness was the reason why the genre was called chain drama, in which two different genres were to be organically connected like a chain.

In particular, it was scenes considered too spectacular to be dramatized on the stage, including battle scenes, chases, or showdowns that were inserted as filmed footage. For example, in one of the earliest chain dramas in Japan, which was set during the Russo-Japanese War, there was a scene where the torpedoed enemy's ship was sinking.<sup>264</sup> As a way of depicting the battle scene more realistically, unknown film footage capturing a foreign navy's military drills had been known to be screened on the backdrop of the stage, a technique that was highly acclaimed for its realistic effects. In a similar fashion, many historical dramas in Japan (*jidaigeki*) began to project filmed battle scenes on the screen, which was followed by stage performances by the same actors.<sup>265</sup> Although the length of the motion-picture part was very brief (not exceeding ten minutes), inserting film technology in the middle of a stage performance in this way was one of the meaningful technological experiments that paved the way to the completion as cinematic form from the potential of the brand new visual technology.

The first chain drama in Korea was *The Righteous Revenge* (*Ŭirijŏk kut'o*, 義理の仇討), produced in 1919. The director was Kim To-san who was leading a theater troupe influenced by the Japanese New School Drama (K. *sinp'a*). Although *The*

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<sup>264</sup> The first attempt to combine cinematic footage with live theater in Japan was *Susumuro no kōgun* (Russia-invading imperial army, 征露の皇軍, 1904).

<sup>265</sup> Woo Su-jin, "Yŏnsoegŭk ŭi kŭndae yŏngŭksajŏk ŭiŭi: teknologiwa sasiljŏk mijangsen, yŏbaewu ŭi dŭngjang (Yŏnsoegŭk and Modern Theatricality: The Emergence of Technology, Realistic Mise-en-Scene, and Female Actress)," *Sanghur Hakbo* 20 (2007), 183.

*Righteous Revenge* was initially planned as a *sinp'a* play, it was Pak Sŭng-p'il's investment, the pioneering businessman in the burgeoning entertainment industry in Korea and the owner of Tansŏngsa theater, that ultimately changed its genre.<sup>266</sup>

Still, as in Japan, chain drama in Korea had a strong affinity with new school dramas in its form and content, whose most prevalent characteristic was moral didacticism based on Manichaeism. As the title suggests, *The Righteous Revenge* was also one of the typical tear-jerkers. According to a recollection of Ahn Jong-hwa, part of the first generation of Korean film historians, *The Righteous Revenge* depicted a young man's suffering due to the plot of his stepmother and his subsequent retribution. The brief plot goes as follows: Songsan is a young man who was born into a well-to-do family, but his step mother is plotting to usurp his considerable fortune that he had inherited. As the malicious conceit of those coveting his assets continues to the extent that it even puts Songsan's safety into danger, he is led to confront his enemies with the righteous help of two sworn brothers.<sup>267</sup>

Despite its banal and clichéd storyline, what made *The Righteous Revenge* innovative was the use of actual film footage shot on various locations in Seoul and inserted for a climax chase scene in between stage performances. Thanks to Pak's investment, Kim Do-san and his staff were able to set out to look for scenic locales within and outskirts of Kyŏngsŏng and shoot them on location to be included for depicting a chase scene. The places and locales that Kim Do-san and his staff visually reproduced in this process included the steel bridge over the Han River, Changch'ungdan,

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<sup>266</sup> *Meail sinbo*, October 26, 1919.

<sup>267</sup> Ahn Jong-hwa, *Han 'guk yŏnghwa ch'ŭngmyŏnbisa* (An Inside History of the Korean Cinema) (Seoul, Korea: Hyŏndae mihaksa, 1998), 46.

a historic shrine turned into an amusement park near Japanese settler's enclave, Yŏngmi bridge located in Chongno, the South Gate station for the Seoul trolley car line, Chŏngwan Bridge, streetcars, trains, cars, Noryangjin, parks, and so forth.<sup>268</sup> Despite being short in its length, the dynamic depiction of the car chase scene was considered a staple element newly added to the play, and thus the release of *The Righteous Revenge* was promoted as the first Chosŏn Adventure Play (*hwalgŭk*) in a newspaper advertisement.<sup>269</sup>

Given that there is no remaining footage and that the genre was closer to live performance except for the short insertion of a film screening, it is hard to reconstruct the exact context of how the chase scene was constructed and presented. Nevertheless, an often-cited recollection attests to the ways in which motion-pictures were organically blended into stage performance:

In the middle of the stage performance, the actors hurriedly leave the stage. Other actors who perform together on the stage also follow them. At this time, with a whistle, a screen made out of calico fabric falls down to the stage to which a motion-picture begins to be projected. Without allowing a single moment for audiences to express their astonishment by uttering 'Ah!' the same actors that were seen performing on the stage just now are also featured in the motion-picture. The chased gets on a standby motor vehicle and begins to speed up. The chaser pursues the chased also on a car ride, although we do not know how he got it. Chase after chase. The motor vehicle dashed onto the screen from a five-mile distance. For the next five minutes, the motor car rushes into the fixed camera until it draws aside, filling the screen full. The next scene also features the running car again until it disappears out of the frame in five minutes. As the chase between the two motor cars continues along and finally the chaser catches up with the chased, the cotton screen climbs up with a whistle again. And the very same sequence of the motion-picture footage is transported to the stage performance in which the same actors begin to prepare a showdown. What a marvelous spectacle.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> *Meail Sinbo*, October 26, 1919.

<sup>269</sup> *Meail Sinbo*, October 26, 1919.

<sup>270</sup> Cho P'ungyŏn, *Sŏul chaphak sajŏn* (The Trivia Encyclopedia about Seoul), (Seoul, Korea: Chŏngdong ch'ulpansa, 1989), 222-223. Recited from Kim Jong Won, "Han'guk yŏnghwa paengnyŏn gwa kijŏm ŭi munjejŏm (The Problem of the Origin of a Hundred Year's of Korean Film History)," *Kongyŏn'gwa ribyu* 24, no.4, (2019), 25-26.

In addition to a detailed depiction on the transitional procedures between live performance and film screening and vice versa, the above citation also enables us to have a glimpse about how many sensory sensations the chase scene created among audiences with access to film technology. If we are reminded of the initial shock of the first audience when encountering the image of an onrushing train on the screen, as discussed in Chapter One, it is not difficult to see how remarkable the reality-effect of the dashing motor vehicles exerted on the audience would have been. When it comes to representing the speed and motion of onrushing motor vehicles in a chase scene, there is no doubt that the motion-picture would have been the most suitable medium.

In its attempt to manufacture domestic landscapes as a background using film technology, what was central with the hybrid genre and its predecessors was to represent technology *per se* for more spectacular effects. In his sense, it is worth noting that Kim Do-san, the director of *The Righteous Revenge*, had been keen to incorporate electricity to create another transitional genre, the electrified *sinp'a* plays, while foreshadowing the coming of chain drama.<sup>271</sup> The use of electricity as part of attraction traces back to the early 1910s when local theaters began to regularize and diversify their program: Together with the splendid façade of theaters decorated with illumination, the application of electricity was always highlighted in the advertisements and acclaimed for its aesthetic effects when combined with a kisaeng's dance performance.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Kim Do-san had been known to have learned the use of *kine-o-rama* in Japan, which was another electric device similar to yuni-basu and produced several electrified *sinp'a* plays using both kine-o-rama and yuni-basu since September that year. See Woo Su-jin, Kim Jong Won and Han Sang Ŏn.

<sup>272</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, March 1913.

The first electrified Korean play appeared in 1919, only a few months before the release of the first chain drama and briefly attracted viewers using an electronic device called a “yuni-basu.”<sup>273</sup> Just as *sinp’a* was a genre directly influenced by the Japanese new school drama, it was Japanese predecessors that made this technical incorporation possible; the similar kind of electric device called *kine-o-rama* that can project colorful lights to the background of the stage were featured for the theater performances as early as 1913 at the Japanese movie theaters. Purportedly, the yuni-basu has been known to be an electric device that could create special audiovisual effects. According to a newspaper advertisement, for example, it was advertised as a machine that could cause the effects of rain and lightning during the performance of a *sinp’a* play and it was highly acclaimed due to its enhanced sensory appeal.<sup>274</sup> The use of an electric device was not confined to creating rain and lightning. Another tragic *sinp’a* play written as an adaptation of a murder case in Jeju island was advertised for the use of an unknown electric device to make the special effects included for the scene of ghost’s appearance.<sup>275</sup> No doubt, the use of electricity was extensively promoted as a novel and a “wondrous (*kiihan* and *kimyohan*)” attraction in newspaper advertisements and continued to appear in the program.<sup>276</sup>

As the electric device prefigured the coming of motion-pictures in reproducing reality effects as such, what distinguished the electrified *sinp’a* play most from other genres was its capacity to be able to reproduce visual spectacles that looked like real landscapes. As Woo Su-jin, a Korean literature scholar, points out, the emerging audience

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<sup>273</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, February 1, 1913; May 9, 1919.

<sup>274</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, May 9, 1919 and June 1, 1919.

<sup>275</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, May 31 1919 and June 1, 1919.

<sup>276</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, May 9, 1919, May 10, 1919, July 19, 1919.

began to expect more realistic or domesticated representations from this Japanese-influenced genre of *sinp'a* play, which had been best characterized by melodramatic exaggerations.<sup>277</sup> Stage productions replete with special effects, based on electrified technology, can also be understood in this regard. Not only as aestheticized attractions but also for enhancing reality-effects, all of these technological experiments accommodated the growing expectation of audiences to see real landscape and paved the way for the full bloom of the silent film era beginning from the mid-1920s to a more complete mastery of visual technology.

Nevertheless, the genre's unique articulation of cinematic technology generated a controversy when it emerged and proliferated. Between one of the earliest cinematic experiments made possible with nascent capital and manpower and a mutant genre of legitimate theater, it was denounced as an incomplete and abnormal genre still tinged with premodern themes. For literary pundits in pursuit of more decent and enlightened art forms suitable for modern Korea (realism in particular), chain drama was nothing more than a replica of tear-jerking stage melodramas that inherited low-brow sentiments from them and combined them with film technology as part of piquing viewer's curiosity. For example, a pioneering film producer and director, Yun Baek-nam criticized the genre's recourse to motion-pictures as inappropriate and redundant, while the plays lacked integrality in the development of a story.<sup>278</sup> For those who had been advocating the edifying role of the theater genre as the vanguard of the Civilization and Enlightenment Movement (*Munmyōng kaehwa undong*), the genre's tendency to seek stimulation,

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<sup>277</sup> Woo, 179.

<sup>278</sup> Yun Baek-nam, "Yōngūkgwa sahoe: Byōnghayō chosōn hyundae gūkjāngūl nonham (Cinema and Society: Discussing on the Modern Theaters in Korea)," *Tongah Ilbo*, May 16, 1920.

entertainment, and excitement was not welcomed. In a similar manner, a famed left-wing writer, director, and film critic, Im Hwa, underestimated the short-lived genre for its incompleteness and denounced it as a means of assistance completely dependent on the theater genre, which should not be considered cinema.<sup>279</sup>

Despite these drawbacks, *The Righteous Revenge* came to be celebrated as *the origin* of the Korean cinema due to the fact that it was the first production made possible by Korean capital and directorship.<sup>280</sup> Undoubtedly, *The Righteous Revenge* brought to an end the two-decade-long “stage of mere viewing,” as Im Hwa put it, the stagnant state during which Koreans remained incapable of producing their own productions and only consumed foreign-made representations. For the purpose of this chapter, however, what makes *The Righteous Revenge* an even more meaningful text lies in that it contains the very first mode of mechanized representations selected not through the eyes of a Western traveler, nor by a Japanese cameraman, but by a Korean director who was finally able to control the visual technology for his own representation. As advertised in a newspaper, *The Righteous Revenge* was the first cinematic instance that featured Korean actors at the backdrop of domestic landscapes.<sup>281</sup> In this regard, it is worth examining how *The Righteous Revenge* appropriated places and locales and contributed to forging a shared sense of national territory, and how these representations are distinguished from those of the Westerners.

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<sup>279</sup> Im Hwa, Chosŏn yŏnghwa paldalssosa (A Brief History on the Development of Korean Cinema), *Samch’oli* (June, 1941, 6), 197. Reprinted in Baek Mun-im, *Im Hwa ŭi Yŏnghwa* (Im Hwa’s Cinema), (Seoul, Korea: Somyŏng ch’ulpan, 2015), 271-282.

<sup>280</sup> *The Righteous Revenge* was first released in Tansŏngsa in October 27, 1919 and the date was designated as “Cinema Day” in 1966 to commemorate the historic beginning of the Korea cinema.

<sup>281</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, October 26, 1910.

In explaining how chain drama produced, appropriated, and controlled specific places and locales in urbanizing Kyōngsōng, Baek Mun Im, a Korean film scholar, points out that chain drama consisted of “the newly discovered attractions in tandem with the extension of transportation infrastructures, including streetcar and networks of roads, rather than traditional scenic spots.”<sup>282</sup> Just like Ch’oe Nam-sōn’s “Song of Seoul-Pusan Railways” had discovered new places and locales as new spatial signposts following the newly-built railway lines, *The Righteous Revenge* reinterpreted previously less known locations, which had not been made accessible until the coming of transportation infrastructure in addition to the traditional landmarks of Kyōngsōng. While reflecting tremendous changes brought to the traditional spatial ordering of old capital, chain drama’s use of motion-picture was a salient instantiation of a “mobilized virtual gaze” in the Korean context, as Baek Mun Im puts it.<sup>283</sup>

Interestingly, there is a clear overlapping between the extension of railways and the destination of location shooting in *The Righteous Revenge*. For example, the bridge over the Han River was built to connect the Seoul-Inch’ōn railways to its terminal near the South Gate and Noryangjin was the last stop on that railway right before crossing the bridge. This tendency for shooting crews to have followed the newly built transportation infrastructure continued for the subsequent productions. In less than a month since the first chain drama came to stage, Kim Do-san and his troupe came to release another chain drama titled *Friendship [Siujōng]*, which depicts Hongnūng and Chōngryangni on the

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<sup>282</sup> Baek Mun Im, “Chosōn yōnghwa ūi p’unggyōng ūi palgyōn: Yōnswaegūk gwa konggan chōnyu (The Discovery of Landscape in Chosōn Cinema: Chain Drama and the Appropriation of Space),” *Tongbang hakji* 158 (June 2012), 281-283.

<sup>283</sup> Baek, 281-283.



first trolley line and the newly built thoroughfare between Seoul and Wŏnsan.<sup>284</sup> In a sense, the great landscapes in these chain dramas would not have been discovered had it not been for this technological collusion between motion-picture and modern traffic.

Moreover, the fact that modern transportation itself oftentimes became a meaningful attraction regardless of its diegetic function in the play exemplifies the earliest attempt to exploit representations of transportation in rendering landscape in a cinematic way. One recollection of the shooting of the scene of *The Righteous Revenge* describes an interesting moment when a 1915 Ford convertible caught curious attention from bystanders who had flocked to watch the filming.<sup>285</sup> The kind of conspicuous representational strategy was not the case only with *The Righteous Revenge* as foregrounding transportation seems to have served as a selling point in promoting the genre in general. Let alone relying on trains, trolleys, and motorcars, even airplanes, boats, and steamships were utilized for the earliest production of chain dramas. Following *The Righteous Revenge*, for example, another chain drama produced by Kim So-ryang that had premiered at Tansŏngsa was advertised for the actual shot of a flying airplane in addition to location shots from a zoo and Pagoda Park.<sup>286</sup> Also, water-based transports also became another major repertory for chain drama. According to a newspaper advertisement, Lim Sŏnggu, another leading *sinp'a* theater troupe of the time was about to produce a chain drama based on an adaptation of a well-known *sinp'a* story, *Chaghanmong*, which had been serialized in the same newspaper. Having been made possible thanks to the support of Pak Sŭng-p'il, as well and by hiring a cameraman

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>285</sup> Ahn, 39.

<sup>286</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, April 7, 1922.

recruited from Tokyo's International Film Company, Lim's troupe was about to start filming great action scenes shot on a steamboat and a boat set on the seaside of Inch'ŏn and Pyŏngyang's Taedong River.<sup>287</sup>

Regarding chain drama's obsession with various means of transportations, it has been pointed out that US serial films, which began to gain popularity in Korea around the late 1910s, exerted great influence on. Especially the suspenseful construction of vehicle-driven chase scenes has been discussed most.<sup>288</sup> As the earliest form of the action-adventure genre based on serial novels, the convention of the serial film genre was to deploy clichéd settings and put the protagonists in a perilous situation that usually ended with a cliffhanger. As part of enhancing visual suspense from viewers, the staple device unique to this genre included "highlighting action, stunt-based thrills, violence, suspense, and spectacle," in addition to chase scenes using various means of transportation.<sup>289</sup>

In colonial Korea, the most reverberating serial film was Francis Ford's *The Broken Coin* (1915). As a typical serial film consisting of numerous loosely connected episodes yet featuring the same characters, the overarching narrative pattern was constructed centering on the main character's confrontations with villains during his world adventures looking for gold. Since it was first released in a theater in Seoul in 1916, the popularity it gained had been enormous to the extent that it was reproduced in the form of several media, including gramophone records and translated booklets for better

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<sup>287</sup> *Meail Sinbo*, March 24, 1920.

<sup>288</sup> For the discussions on popular consumption of Western serial films in Korea, see Baek Mun Im, "Kamsangŭi sidae, chosŏnŭi miguk yŏnsogyŏnghwa (American Serial Films in Chosun)," *Sai* 14 (2013), 213-264 and Yi Sun Jin, "Chosŏn musŏngyonghwa ŭi hwalgŭksŏng gwa kongyŏnsŏng e daehan yŏngu (A Study on "Action" and "Performance" modes in Chosŏn's Silent Film)," (Chŭngang University, Ph.D. dissertation, 2008), 63-90.

<sup>289</sup> Ben Singer, "Serials," in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, Richard Abel ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 583.

circulation, and the movie itself was called on for re-runs for the next ten years.<sup>290</sup> As previous studies have shown, serial films including *The Broken Coin* provided the prototypical narrative patterns and character formations for the emerging popular culture production in colonial Korea.<sup>291</sup>

The enthusiastic reception of serial films in colonial Korea could be understood in line with various kinds of early travelogues, which gained huge popularity a decade ago. While still looking to the world, which was made possible by the innovations of modern transportation, viewers now came to be identified not with the eyes of a Western traveler but with the adventure of a fictional character. In this sense, as Yi Sun-jin points out, serial films depicting an adventurous character's ubiquitous presence all over the world in search of a big fortune could have been a more effective and sophisticated vehicle in spreading imperial ideology than travel films, which allows viewers a voyeuristic position at best.<sup>292</sup>

Despite controversies whether or not *The Righteous Revenge* can be considered as the origin of Korean cinema, there is no doubt that *The Righteous Revenge* was monumental in its attempt to shoot various locales in Kyōngsōng on location and feature Korean actors. If reminded of the above discussion that serial films might have colluded to spread the expansionist idea of imperialism, staging Korean actors at the backdrop of familiar sites in *The Righteous Revenge* would have meant more than a narrative technique for intensifying suspense. In this way, the growing number of cinema viewers in Korea, who used to envision imaginary world geography by the proxy of the

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<sup>290</sup> Regarding the popularity of *The Broken Coin* in colonial Korea, see Yi, 63-90,

<sup>291</sup> See Yi (2008) and Baek (2014)

<sup>292</sup> Yi, 76.

Westerner's gaze in travelogues or serial films, came to appropriate places and locales of their own land. Whereas the wondrous technological complex between travel and motion-picture previously served for imperialistic mode of vision to optically grasp the world a decade ago, *The Righteous Revenge* heralded that non-Westerners began to domesticate those technologies for their own representation.

### **The Cinematic Discovery of the Sublime Landscapes and The Enlightenment**

As I have examined, technology and transportation have been celebrated as civilizational progress in the enlightenment discourses and travel representations of Ch'oe Nam-sŏn, the colonial politics of Itō Hirobumi, and the cinematic figuration of a national landscape in chain dramas. While symbolically representing infrastructure, however, a tendency has been simultaneously manifest in the pursuit of the nation's self-representation that aim to aestheticize sites and places of scenic beauty and historic significance.

In this sense, what is notable is that two travel-themed actualities that were purely devoted to depicting scenic views — rather than the thrills of technology — were released in the same year when *The Righteous Revenge* made a technical breakthrough by mobilizing vernacular landscapes for the first time in Korean film history: One is *The Panoramic View of Kyŏngsŏng* (1919) and the other is *The Great Motion-Picture of Mt. Kŭmgang* (1919).

*The Panoramic View of Kyŏngsŏng* (*Kyŏngsŏng chŏnsi ŭi kyŏng*, 京城全市의景) is a by-product travel footage consisting of the same scenes taken for the production of *The Righteous Revenge*, which was simultaneously released with the former on the same day.

The enthusiastic reception of these two different genres of films is described in a newspaper as follows:

Because audiences flocked to the theater like a tidal surge from early in the evening, the theater drew a full house from the top to the bottom floor in an instant, having sold out all tickets. As the screening began, what was projected first was the panoramic view of Kyōngsōng shot from Namdaemun (the South Gate), which garnered constant clapping and cheering from the audience. Thereafter, live performances of *sinp'a* actors followed. In that this was the first Korean cinema that had fascinated everyone almost intoxicatingly, it made for an unprecedented success.<sup>293</sup>

Shot in various locales around Kyōngsōng, which was made accessible through the extension of the streetcar lines and new thoroughfares, *The Panoramic View of Kyōngsōng* technically seemed to precede the main screening of *The Righteous Revenge*, serving as a pre-screening event.<sup>294</sup> Although it has been largely unexplored in existing film histories that sought to locate the origin of the Korean national cinema by centering on feature films, the presence of the travel film and its favorable reception shows the prominent status of travel actualities as a rational amusement during this early phase of cinematic history. As a separate genre distinguished from chain drama that followed it, *The Panoramic View of Kyōngsōng* garnered huge applause from the historic audience who might have been alarmed by the sense of contemporaneousness of the projected visual images. Regardless of the intended effects when the location shots were incorporated into the narrative of the chain drama — i.e. for the suspenseful construction of the chase scene, the technological sublime (for instance, a more familiar landscape of their own ethnic spaces) provided colonial audiences with an unprecedented opportunity to appropriate self-ethnographic spatial representations manufactured by cinema.

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<sup>293</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, October 29, 1919.

<sup>294</sup> Kim, 30. Based on this temporality ahead of *The Righteous Revenge*, Kim claims that *The Panoramic View of Kyōngsōng* should be reconsidered as the origin of the Korean cinema.



Figure 11. A newspaper advertisement of *The Righteous Revenge* and *The Panoramic View of Kyongsong*, Source: *Maeil Sinbo* October 28, 1919.

Another scenic film was released in the same year and the same theater, *Tansongsu*. Produced by the staff and sponsorship of South Manchuria Railways Company, *The Great Motion-Picture of Mt. Kūmgang* (*Kūmgangsan dae hwaldong*) was known to have depicted the superb beauty of Mt. Kūmgang.<sup>295</sup> As it had been highly acclaimed for “representing magnificent sceneries of Mt. Kūmgang just like seeing them under our very nose” during its previous Korean tour, the theater bargained with the SMR and its Kyongsong office to obtain the film.<sup>296</sup> Given the short interval in programing, the release of *The Great Motion-Picture of Mt. Kūmgang* had been decided possibly

<sup>295</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, November 28, 1919.

<sup>296</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, November 28, 1919.

encouraged by the success of *The Righteous Revenge* and *The Panoramic View of Kyōngsōng*.

According to Baek Moon Im, the popular reception of *The Great Motion-Picture of Mt. Kūmgang* should be explained in relation to the extension of transportation and the institutionalization of tourism.<sup>297</sup> As she points out with the notion of “mobilized virtual gaze,” it is the extension of Seoul-Wōnsan railways in 1914 that facilitated the film crew’s access to the northwestern part of Korea where Mt. Kūmgang is located. Given that it was the sponsorship of the SMR that produced this travel film in the first place, the discovery of cinematic landscape aroused at the intersection of tourism and railways. In fact, the completion of an artery line to Mt. Kūmgang in 1923 and the popularization of modern tourism in the 1920s contributed to the reappropriation of Mt. Kūmgang as a touristic site and *The Great Motion-Picture of Mt. Kūmgang* was known to have repeatedly screened until then.<sup>298</sup> Together with *The Panoramic View of Kyōngsōng*, the 1919 travel actuality to Mt. Kūmgang must have been monumental as the earliest attempt to reproduce national landscape in a cinematic way. Just as *The Righteous Revenge* and *The Panoramic View of Kōngsōng* manufactured sceneries of an urbanizing Kyōngsōng following the extended routes of transportation infrastructure, *The Great Motion-Picture of Mt. Kūmgang* reproduced the magnificent beauty of the natural world.

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<sup>297</sup> Baek (2012), 290.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 290. Mt. Kūmgang was the popular tour site that had been vigorously promoted in the travel writing of the leading enlightenment thinkers including Ch’oe Nam-sōn and Yi Kwang-su.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to go back to the problematic of the sublime raised in the Introduction in light of the relation among technology, landscape, and the enlightenment. One of Yi Sang's essays, "Journey to a Mountain Village [*Sanch'on yŏjŏng*, 1935]" contains an interesting depiction of a night's outdoor film screening organized by a financial association.<sup>299</sup> At a school playground, the motion-picture, "the most beloved of our century" and "the eighth art reigning over all kinds of art forms" was to be screened for those innocent village people "who have never seen electric light except for an automobile's headlights."<sup>300</sup> A short speech of a high-ranking officer of the financial association, who was standing in the spotlight, was followed by ten minutes of intermission:

Night falls. The moon almost corresponding to the tenth of a month is rising slightly past the early evening. Laying out a straw mat to the ground, legend-like citizens begin to flock. Are their appearances no different from those of penguins in the Arctic who huddled together in front of a gramophone while tiling their head sideways? ... It started. A pier in a port of Busan appeared. Then, it is followed by Pyŏngyang's Moranbong peak. The steel bridge over the Yalu River is historically projected. Clapping and applause...<sup>301</sup>

Except for the general information that a mixture of documentaries, newsreels, and pedagogic dramas constituted a major program for this itinerant film screening, few facts had been known about filmic repertoires that were actually shown to rural areas. Yet Yi Sang's personal recollection attests to an interesting fact about the program. In a typical setting that combined film screening with an enlightening lecture of a bank official that

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<sup>299</sup> As he had been suffering from tuberculosis, Yi Sang spent a month in a small mountain village in Pyŏng'an Namdo to convalesce. Deploying urbanistic, modernistic, and exotic poetic languages and imageries appealing to reader's sensory perception, Yi Sang depicts nostalgic and quiet lives in a rural area in contrast to bustling lives in a city.

<sup>300</sup> Yi Sang, *Sanch'on yŏjŏng (Conclusion)*, *Taehan Maeil Sinbo*, October 11, 1935.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., *Taehan Maeil Sinbo*, October 11, 1935



may have encouraged people to save money, what was shown to viewers in a remote mountain village was no longer skyscrapers in a Western metropole, but domestic sights of Korea, including a bridge built in a pier at Busan, the steel bridge over the Yalu River connected to the Manchurian railways, and the landmark view of Pyöngyang overlooking beautiful scenes of the Taedong River.

If seen from today's conception of cinema, not only the repertory but also the mode of the exhibition in the above recollection may look unusual. However, the above depiction on a night's screening in a rural village bears witness to the prevalent mode of the cinematic exhibition in colonial Korea, which developed simultaneously with the institutionalization of the entertainment industry in the cities. Organized based on itinerant film practice, on the one hand, an apparent purpose of the screening looks rather educational than entertaining. On the other hand, to those people who had been barely exposed to modern conveniences, including electricity, it was not only the contents of the film but also the cinematic technology itself that was entertaining.

In other words, what attracted people to flock to that night's screening was not only representations of magnificent infrastructure but also picturesque natural scenery, which combined an edifying speech of the organizer. To be sure, the fact that the experience of cinema-viewing in Korea began to appreciate domestic landscapes could have been the moment comparable to the discovery of landscape in Japan's modern literature, as examined by Karatani Kojin. In the development of indigenous film production in Korea, however, what should be noted is that not only the representing technology but also representations of technology played an integral part in this process. By showing off the very means of production to which they were previously forced to surrender as a

spectacle, this was another salient manifestation of a technological sublime. In this process, previously unmeaning places came to be signified as landscapes to be appreciated.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Cinema as Infrastructure: Movie Theaters, the City Planning, and the Colonial Public Sphere

Rather than requiring a State to build the roads that enable the circulation of its commodities, as did Ford, the cinema builds its pathways of circulation directly into the eyes of and sensorium of its viewers.

Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production*

Colonial publicness emerges, therefore, precisely in places that lack the official confirmation of the public's existence. In this way, colonial publicness serves as a metaphor for 'the political' during Korea's colonial period.

Yun Hae-dong, *Colonial Publicness as Metaphor*

This chapter examines the emergence and development of movie theaters in Korea not only as materialistic infrastructure for the institutionalization of cinema-viewing but also in relation to the formation of a colonial public sphere, which was propelled, transformed and complicated amid the ongoing urbanization under Japan's colonial rule. For the two decades since the inception of film technology, the beginning of movie theater was marked by social, political, cultural transformations of urban Seoul and its later development that facilitated the transition of the motion-picture from novel amusement imported from the West to local enterprise. The erection of modern infrastructures played a central role in this process. While providing unprecedented mobility, changing perceptions on space and time, and challenging the existing social ranks, for example, the newly built streetcars served as a major catalyst that helped to form the earliest spectatorship in Korea who flocked to the nighttime screenings. In light of this

inseparable relation between infrastructure and the emergence of cinema-going as both commercial and social practice, the first section of this chapter historicizes the appearance of modern theaters as an infrastructure of both entertainment and enlightenment for the emergent mass public.

The development of permanent movie theaters in the 1910s, however, was primarily the result of the colonialist's version of urban transformation that had replaced the Korean monarch's endeavor for a more spontaneous modernization. Proposing the first urban reform plan for Keijō (1913-17), the Government-General in Colonial Korea embarked on progressive city-planning by stages through which "the symbolic and material landscape of Hanyang, the royal city of the Chosŏn dynasty, was transformed into the colonial capital of Keijō (Kyōngsŏng)."<sup>302</sup> Paying attention the ways in which modern infrastructures were planned, materialized and mobilized as a political form of spectacle, this chapter also examines how colonial city planning created and reinforced ethnically segregated spatial patterns of film spectatorship from an urban sociological perspective. Contrary to Japanese official's dual intents to showcase their modernizing techniques through improving the cityscape of Seoul while promoting spatial assimilation at the same time, Japan's techno-politics in implementing infrastructures resulted in uneven developments rather than integrating ethnically dichotomic social spaces. As a result, movie theaters in colonial Korea transformed from ethnically hybrid space to ethnically segregated space while forming separated film spectatorship. Tracing this trajectory from desegregation to resegregation, I show that movie theaters, as

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<sup>302</sup> Todd A. Henry, *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 22.

infrastructure, could serve both for consolidation and fragmentation under the colonial social hierarchy.

In doing so, I focus on the spatiality of movie theaters in which not only motion-pictures, new ideas, and people were circulated, but also power was exercised. As both tangible artifact and symbolic network, movie theaters constituted an alternative public sphere, which could have been more controversial in the colonial context. According to Miriam Hansen, early cinema “provided the conditions for an alternative public sphere” particularly for “peripheral social groups (immigrants, members of the recently urbanized working class, women) and thus “catering to people with specific needs, anxieties, and fantasies — people whose experience was shaped by more or less traumatic forms of territorial and cultural displacement.”<sup>303</sup> As I will show in the below, the Korean cinematic history had an ethnically diverse and segregated origin due to the ubiquitous presence of local Japanese settlers. Moreover, the interests of Japanese settler entrepreneurs and colonial authorities did not always coincide. Prior to the mid-1920s, when the General-Government of Colonial Korea began to mobilize cinematic apparatus including movie theater for assimilation by enacting the ordinances about regulating film’s exhibition practice, the ethnically segregated spectatorship in this transitional period allowed unique configuration of movie theaters in the colonial society as an ethnic ghetto. Among others, the language was the major barrier in assimilating spectatorship. Oftentimes accompanied by the live performance of *pyŏnsa*, the Korean translator and performer, movie theaters exclusively targeting at Korean audiences became a politically rebellious space for Korean national-consciousness to be collectively and imaginarily

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<sup>303</sup> Miriam Hansen, “Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformation of the Public Sphere,” 147.

experienced. Extending Miriam Hansen's insight in light of colonial spectatorship in Korea, the last section of this chapter examines the ways in which cinema served "as a catalyst for new forms of community and solidarity," thus constituting a colonial public sphere.<sup>304</sup>

### **Infrastructure of Entertainment and Enlightenment: The Emergence of Theatrical Space, Mass Audience, and the Public Sphere**

The beginning of modern theater space in Korea was marked by the founding of the royal theater called *Hyömyulsa*, which was built with a purpose to stage a royal ceremony in celebration of the fortieth anniversary of Kojong's coronation in 1902.<sup>305</sup> Regarding its location and detailed material features, the recollection of Ch'oe Nam-sön provides a meaningful description, enabling us to reconstruct the architectonics of a building of which no traces exist:

Having been built upon a small section of *Pongsangsa* and imitating the Colosseum in Rome, albeit a reduced size, a small theater-in-the-round made of brick was erected where the church is positioned these days..... As it was equipped with the stage, audience sittings on three sides, stage curtains, and an anteroom, it was not only the first theater in Chosön, but also the only national theater comparable to London's or Vienna's Royal Theaters.<sup>306</sup>

Comparable to the royal theaters in European cities, the *Hyömyulsa* was purported to be a state-of-the-art, western-style facility that was built solidly from brick and stone.

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>305</sup> *Hyömyulsa*'s operation had not been regularized until it was turned to *Wongaksa* in 1908. Particularly, due to the fire that broke out during one of the screenings in 1903, the operation of the theater had been suspended until it was reopen in 1904 thanks to the request of audience.

<sup>306</sup> Ch'oe Nam-sön, *Chosönsangsik mundap sokpyön*, (Seoul, Korea: Samsung munhwajaedan, 1972), 222. Recited from Pak No-hyun, "Kükjangüi t'ansaeng, 1900-1910 nyöndae rül chungsimüro (The Birth of the Modern Theater in Korea – Centering around the First Two Decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century)," *Han'uk Gügyesulyöngu* no.19 (2004), 15.

Constructed from existing government offices, it had a relatively proper stage (although not yet a proscenium arch), demarcated by a curtain from an auditorium that was split into two levels and tiered seating.<sup>307</sup> While replicating the formal idioms and grammars of western-style theaters, it was a moderately sized theater with a seating capacity of five hundred.<sup>308</sup>

Composed of solid bricks and stones, the elaborate western-style architectonics of the earliest auditoriums not only symbolized the increased place of previously marginalized popular entertainment on the urban landscape but also rendered the built space of the theater into an emblematic experience of modernity. Given that Korean traditional performing arts were mostly open-air performances requiring neither built stages nor designated seats, the *Hyömyulsa*'s use of indoor spaces, albeit not a permanent cinema yet, was indeed ground-breaking.<sup>309</sup> Clearly, the use of indoor space of these theaters, in turn, effected another remarkable change in the mode of exhibition. Although performers were traveling from place to place to reach audiences, not vice versa, in the long-held tradition of the itinerant exhibition, in order to consume modern forms of entertainment audiences were required to be physically present at designated venues. In this way, the embryo of the entertainment business began to germinate in Korea in two ways. First, as unpredictable conditions that had constrained outdoor performances such as the vicissitudes of weather came to be more controllable, it helped for theaters to regularize the program. Second, by designating a destination, the use of

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<sup>307</sup> Pak, 15. According to him, despite its innovative quality as a modern theater, it was not yet a completely modern facility, lacking a proscenium arch.

<sup>308</sup> Han Sang Ŏn, 32-33.

<sup>309</sup> Even compared to neighboring countries including Japan and China, the history of performance in Korea noticeably was lacking indoor performance genres.

indoor space was apparently convenient in drawing audiences who would have been willing to “travel” and pay for the expense of leisure activities. Although it is known that the traditional culture of theatrical performances in Korea was far from being a lucrative business, the appearance of the historic indoor theater paved the way for the capitalization of entertainment for profit.



**Figure 12. Hyömnnyulsa, circa 1908.** Undated photography, *Source:* The Korean History Net (*Uri yōksa net*) managed by the National Institute of Korean History (*Kuksap 'yōnch'an wiwonhoe*), Last accessed on May 5, 2019.

It is in this vein that a cluster of multi-purpose theaters continued to spring up in Seoul preceding the permanent movie theaters that emerged in 1910 onwards and catered to the earliest urban spectators. These theaters included the warehouse-turned-screening venue of the Korea-America Electric Company (1905), the two-story wooden building of *Dansōngsa* (1908) (a historic multi-purpose performance theater first founded by native Korean entrepreneurs), and Alfred Martin, a French businessman’s western-style brick and stone house that featured French *Pathé* films in a series of night screenings (1908).<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, April 21, and April 24, 1907. According to the advertisements in local newspapers, his western-style brick and stone house was located “east of the new bridge just



Despite varied agencies, which included the royal court, foreign expatriates, and a native Korean, these pioneering movie theaters housed the earliest film screenings, albeit sporadically and alongside a mixed repertory of live theater, dancing, and singing.

As the first performance venue that integrated traditional entertainment genres with the screening of brand-new motion pictures, however, the earliest theaters appeared in the first decade of the twentieth century were ambiguous spaces not entirely driven by commercial imperatives yet. Taking an example of *Hyŏmnyulsa*, although it later turned into a commercialized entertainment center, it was originally a royal theater serviceable for court events including the King's coronation. How the royal theater turned into a commercial venue pursuing profits and who took the revenue remains unclear. However, the *Hyŏmnyulsa*'s commercial operation was corroborated by a newspaper advertisement.<sup>311</sup> According to seat types, it had a fare system with different rates. In this way, it would have been able to appeal to more diverse social strata, from lower-class commoners to upper-class patrons. Even foreigners were able to attend the show without other admission restrictions. Given that traditional spectatorship in Korea had been segregated depending on social rank and gender under the influence of long-held Confucianism, the above advertisement indicates how the commercialization of theater created modern audiences who would have been discriminated only by the price of a ticket.

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outside of West Gate (Sŏdaemun) and "very odd and funny films coming from France" were to be screened there.

<sup>311</sup> *Hwangŏng Sinmun*, December 4, 1902. The advertisement says, "A spring amusement event will be held at our theater from 6:00 pm to 11:00pm. The first-class seat costs 1 won while second-class and third-class tickets cost 70 chŏn and 50 chŏn respectively." Also, it was stated that drinking alcohol and smoking is prohibited at this premise.

While historicizing “the arrival of “the public” in the European context, James Van Horn Melton examined “the expanding networks of print and sociability characteristic of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.”<sup>312</sup> Especially with regard to the rise of the “theater publics,” which was followed by the reading publics and writing publics, his emphasis is two-folds: First, the improvements in street illumination played a central role in increasing the number of sites and occasions for urban sociability through overcoming the constraints of dark nights. Second, theaters became commercialized whose patronage shifted from the court to common consumer. A historical framework describing the European context cannot simply be applied to a Korean context. Yet there are significant parallels. On the one hand, the appearance of the first commercial theater in Korea heralded the birth of theater publics who could afford not only ticket prices but also transportation for nighttime leisure. Clearly, the main catalyst by which nighttime was made available was the progress achieved from rapid urbanization – the newly-built streetcar and the electrification, in particular, as discussed in the first chapter.

On the other hand, it also meant that the secularization of the royal theater. The publicness that used to be attached to the built space of theater no longer remained monopolized by the small number of noble people at the court and became available for the emergent civil society whose constituent included all social strata including women.

Who constituted this early spectatorship has been a contested question. However, the recollection of a foreigner who attended the performance at *Hyömyulsa* enables us to conjecture who was present at these venues.<sup>313</sup> According to him, the seemingly

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<sup>312</sup> James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>313</sup> The foreigner who left a short memoirette titled “En Corée (1904)” has been known as a French engineer named Emil Bourdaret who himself had come to Korea in 1901 invited by the

commercially run public theater accommodated a diverse clientele. The audience composition at *Hyŏmnyulsa* show was incongruous, indeed, including overweening and wealthy-looking young aristocrats dressed up in silk attire and wearing western-style golden eye-glasses, a group of government officials in white and moderate clothing, and even petty peddlers casting envious glances at these boasting young noblemen, who probably would have gotten cheaper tickets to be admitted here.<sup>314</sup> What is notable in his description is the presence of a woman dressed in a traditional overcoat that was used as a veil for women's outings, who ended up sitting on the ground on the first floor without realizing that she could have sat on the bench next to her.

Confucianism had been the governing principle that set the foundation for almost every social order in the Chosŏn dynasty, including strict restrictions on social intermingling between women and men and on women's participation in public activities. Therefore, this mention of a woman's night out has implications for the important, yet unanswered, question of who constituted the spectatorship of emergent mass entertainment, including that of early cinema.<sup>315</sup> Despite the difficulty of identifying the woman's social rank, one thing worthy of note from the above-mentioned recollection is the woman's presence in the same space as men, presumably from various social statuses,

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royal court of the Great Han Empire for a newly launched railway project. His reminiscence on the four years' of stay in Korea was translated into Korean in 2009 and provided valuable descriptions on society of the late Chosŏn dynasty captured through the eyes of a Westerner.

<sup>314</sup> Emile Bourdaret in *Taehan che'guk ch'oehui sumgyŏl* (The Last Breath of the Great Han Empire) tr. Chŏng Jin'guk (Seoul, Korea: Kŭrhangari, 2009), 257-259.

<sup>315</sup> Who constituted early cinematic spectatorship has been an important agenda in the study of early cinema. For example, in the US, it has been known that it was mostly the emergent working-class including immigrants who viewed the cheap amusements at Nickelodeon and exuberated on the visual shock of modernity. For a detailed discussion, see Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

and even with a foreigner. As a motley public transcending the confinement of the existing social order that was segregated by gender, class, age, and nationality, they were all waiting for a kind of show that had been performed only at the royal palace – the dancing of *kisaeng*.

The coexistence of heterosocial and heterosexual audiences who would be distinguished only by way of their ticket prices also blurred the boundary between the low-brow culture and the high-brow one. As described in the observations of a foreign traveler, that night's enthusiasm mostly arose from the fact that the private forms of entertainment that had been previously monopolized by the royal court or a small number of upper-class patrons were to be made available to any clientele capable of paying for a ticket. According to Emile Bourdaret, the climax of that night's show, which was the most anticipated by all, was the dancing of *kisaeng* who used to serve at the royal court as specialized entertainers. These young girls had no shyness at all in their performance, and they were the genuine novelty of the show and made these audiences rush to the theater.<sup>316</sup> In the sense that women and members of different classes, ethnicities, and nationalities who might rarely have encountered one another previously could now share the same place and that entertainments that had previously been enjoyed in the privacy of the royal court came to be consumed *en masse* in a rather collective manner, there is no doubt that these theaters contributed to “democratizing” and “popularizing” entertainment forms. Departing from the traditional cultural hierarchies in which “high” cultures were demarcated from “low-brow” ones, this new mode of spectatorship at the

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<sup>316</sup> Emile Bourdaret, 257-259.

theater seemed to blur the gendered spatial distinctions between private (for women) and public (for male) spheres.

Nevertheless, the stabilization of movie theaters was not the only factor that stimulated for a mass audience to emerge. The emergence of indoor theaters as a new social space should be understood in line with other spectatorial practices that emerged concurrently and were to be collectively and intersubjectively experienced as a group. In turn-of-the-century Korea where civilization and enlightenment (*Munmyōng kaewha*) was the spirit of the times and the most pressing mission that was pursued not only from the above but also at the grass-root level, the emergence of a mass audience in theaters was foreshadowed by the rise of print media and mass rallies. One notable example is the Ten Thousand People's Convention (*Manmin Kongdonghoe*), a mass rally organized by the Korean Independence Club (*Tongnip hyōphoe*).<sup>317</sup>

According to Kim Soyoung, a Korean film scholar, the formation and experience of the Ten Thousand People's Convention provided an important foundation upon which cinema-viewing could be established as a social practice from foreign amusement.<sup>318</sup> As

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<sup>317</sup> Consisting of a group of elite reformers, most of whom had previously studied in the US such as Sō Chaep'il, Yi Sūngman, Yi Sangjae, and Yun Ch'ijo, the Korean Independence Club was the first civil organization in Korea devoted to various forms of enlightenment movement. In their attempt to civilize people and imbue them with patriotic sentiments at a time of foreign penetration, their notable social engagement included the construction of the Independent Gate as a symbol through which to claim the nation's sovereign autonomy and publishing *Independence Daily*, the first newspaper written in Korean vernacular and English. As expressed in the first editorial, the purpose of publishing a newspaper both in Korean and English was to let people know nation's exact situation, and to increase readability so that it could reach out to wider audience regardless of gender, social ranks and even nationality. In parallel with the top-down initiative of the monarch, these *kaehwa* reformers were the most ardent advocates of the nation's modernization, while promoting new ideas of civil rights, new learnings for self-strengthening, and the importance of protecting nation's sovereignty. The political goal of the Independent Club was geared to republicanism based on civil rights of common people and they came to be forcefully disbanded by the King precisely for the same reason.

<sup>318</sup> Soyoung Kim, "Cartography of Catastrophe: Pre-Colonial Surveys, Post-Colonial Vampires, and the Plight of Korean Modernity," *Journal of Korean Studies* 16.2 (2011), 286.

part of their efforts to enlighten people into a modern subject, the first large-scaled mass rally in modern Korean history called the Ten Thousand People's Convention was launched at Seoul's most bustling business quarter of Chongno in 1897. Having featured speakers and orators from all social strata, embracing *yangban* aristocrats, students, petty merchants, religious leaders, women, children and even the traditionally ostracized class of butchers, it was an unprecedented form of mass gathering where people could freely express their political opinions in speeches, often followed by unbridled discussions. The reverberation created by this mass assembly was enormous, to the degree that more than 10,000 people congregated at one of the rallies held at Chongno in 1898, where a rice vendor was elected as the president of the organization. Although in the beginning it was initiated and guided by the lead members of the Independence Club, the Ten Thousand People's Convention gradually evolved into a more autonomous civil organization. Before its forced dissolution by the monarch for fear of their call for parliamentarism, the Ten Thousand People's Convention opened up the public sphere in which people with varied interests could "advocate their political demands through communicative action in the public realm."<sup>319</sup>

Centering on the concept of the practice between the two events — public speaking at the Ten Thousand People's Convention and motion-picture screenings, Kim went further to point out that "[t]he spectators, composed of all different classes, in front of the screen at the warehouse movie theater, were not dissimilar to the composition of people attending the General People's Assembly (a.k.a. Ten Thousand People's

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<sup>319</sup> For the discussion on the controversy regarding the role and presence of the public sphere in colonial Korea, see Michael Kim, "The Colonial Public Sphere and the Discursive Mechanism of Mindo," in *Mass Dictatorship and Modernity*, eds., Michael Kim, Michael Schoenhals, and Yong-Woo Kim, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 178.

Convention).”<sup>320</sup> In addition to serving as a new public sphere for mass gathering that prefigured the incipient form of a mass audience embracing all kinds of social ranks, gender, and age at *Hyŏmnyulsa*, the experiences in the Convention and movie theaters were both based on intersubjective communication. Whereas the Convention relied on oral speeches to agitate people, it was the motion of technologized pictures that affected people in theaters.

Reminiscent of politically charged atmosphere of the Convention, movie theaters in the earliest days did not simply serve as an amusement quarter but also constituted the public sphere. Although movie theaters emerged driven by imperatives to capitalize on the medium’s commercial opportunities, another characteristic that best characterized the earliest theater spaces in Korea, (and probably the reception of early cinema in general) is its preoccupation for publicness; it had to function morally and politically, engaging in the promotion of the public, civic, and collective good.<sup>321</sup> In addition to presenting performances, theater spaces were also used to host diverse forms of public outreach events such as charity concerts, government-related publicities or educational lectures.<sup>322</sup> In this way, the built environment of indoor theaters served as an infrastructural network of both entertainment and enlightenment that would provide the material foundation not only for the institutionalization of cinema but also for the reconfiguration of modern subjectivity. Having historicized the embryonic form of theaters and mass audience under

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<sup>320</sup> Kim, 292.

<sup>321</sup> Regarding the orientation for public service implicated with the entertainment industry of Korea, see Yuh Sŏnjŏng, “Musŏng yŏnghwa sidae singmin dosi seoul ŭi yŏnghwa gawnramsŏng yŏngu (A Study on Mass Spectatorship During the Silent Film Era in Colonial City of Seoul)” (Chungahng University, Master’s thesis, 1999) Yi Sun Jin (2008) and Han Sang Ŏn (2010),

<sup>322</sup> Yi Sun Jin, *Chosŏnin kūkchang Tansŏngsa* (A Theater for Koreans, *Tansŏngsa*) (Seoul, Korea: Korea Film Archive, 2011), 20.

the aspect of the public sphere, in what follows, I will move to examine the emergence of local cinema theaters as a key manifestation of the predicament of a multi-ethnic empire.

### **Local Cinemas and Its Multiethnic Root**

The ensuing two decades spanning from 1910 to mid-20s was the time when commercialized movie houses came to proliferate, centering on Kyōngsōng.<sup>323</sup> Although nascent film production had not begun yet and movie screenings still had to share the stage with magic lantern slide shows, theatrical production, and other live sideshow performances, this transition from pre-cinematic to cinematic exhibition began to materialize with the emergence of the permanent theaters presenting a mixture of programming all year around.

The first cinema of this sort was the *Kodŭng yōnyegwan* (hereafter referred as the Kodŭng) sited at the boundary between the northern and southern villages of Kyōngsōng in 1910. The Kodŭng was advertised as “the world’s best cinema theater” and boasted its state-of-the-art facilities equipped with the French *Pathé*’s cutting-edge projector and luxurious amenities such as heating and fan cooling, a smoking room, tearoom, bathroom, and usherettes for female spectators.<sup>324</sup> And its façade was to be ornately

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<sup>323</sup> Although the exact number of theaters built in rural areas remains understudied due to the lack of evidences, it is notable that movie theaters tended to appear earlier in places where the contact with foreigners was relatively easier including port cities or places having traditionally featured foreigners’ restricted residential zones. From 1910 to 1919, including the Kodŭng, there were at least 15 purpose-built cinema theaters in Kyōngsōng alone. At the same time, the building of movie theaters was also outstretching even to the other parts of the country, centering on the nucleus local cities such as Pyongyang, Inchōn, Busan, Wōnsan, Kunsan and Taegu, albeit still being remained on a rudimentary level compared to Kyōngsōng’s proliferation.

<sup>324</sup> *Hwangsōng Sinmun*, February 18, 1910, *Maeil Sinbo* November 8, 1912, *Maeil Sinbo* February 2, 1913.



decorated with electric illumination.<sup>325</sup> Indeed, the Kodŭng's investment in the sophistication of its facilities reminds us of a strategy adapted by the new flagship cinemas in the US in its transition from nickelodeons to more high-class movie palaces.<sup>326</sup> Whether these material improvements were followed by gentrification in the composition of spectatorship – i.e., from low class to upper-middle-class patrons, however, remains under scrutiny in the Korean context. Nevertheless, the fact that differential ticket rates were maintained depending on seat types, and a discount price for children and soldiers, point to the theater's efforts to accommodate a broader range of audiences, which turned out to be a great success.<sup>327</sup> Following the successful positioning of the Kodŭng as luxury cinema, other prestigious urban exhibition venues, including *Umigwan*, began to lure both genders every night to their “plush” and “modern” architectures.<sup>328</sup>

In addition to architectonic improvements and regular program changes, permanent movie houses that appeared around this time provided the newly emergent cinema's regular patrons with more expansive spatial experiences exceeding cinema-viewing alone coinciding with the rise of consumer culture.<sup>329</sup> In this sense, as Miriam Hansen suggested, “[g]oing to the movies during the silent era remained essentially a theater experience, not a film experience.”<sup>330</sup> By incorporating various forms of adjoining

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<sup>325</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, September 30, 1912.

<sup>326</sup> Brain Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, 47.

<sup>327</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, November 8, 1912 and March 6, 1913.

<sup>328</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, December 21, 1912.

<sup>329</sup> The Kodŭng held regular screenings from 6 pm every night throughout year, showcasing films imported from abroad. Their most up-to-date programs consisted of world landscapes, various themed actualities, and short films depicting funny and comical scenes and the program was updated every two weeks.

<sup>330</sup> Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 99.

ventures within them, including tea and coffee house, the earliest theaters served as complex cultural spaces emblematic of urban modernity. One good manifestation of this trend is the case of *Hwanggŭmgwan*, which was launched in 1913 as part of a complex of amusement grounds called *Hwanggŭmyuwon*. Like the Lunar Park in Japan proper, it was an amusement park full of “odd spectacles,” including waterfalls, playground, and mysterious caves and became “a good place to play and watch.”<sup>331</sup> With a relatively moderate admission fee, it became a popular attraction with the influx of visitors and “interesting motion-pictures were highly reputed among others.”<sup>332</sup> As such, the built environment of movie theaters in colonial Korea was configured spatially and perceptually as the dazzling spectacle of urban modernity in its architectonics and materiality.

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<sup>331</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, June 22, 1913.

<sup>332</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, February 21, 1913.



picture industry in Korea.<sup>334</sup> The burgeoning entertainment venture of the film industry came to be reorganized under the hierarchy of the imperial economic system, and the spontaneous progress of nascent Korean entrepreneurship was significantly impeded.<sup>335</sup>

Upon annexation, the presence of Japanese settlers became more visible and hegemonic in numerous parts of the colonial world. As Jun Uchida states, they were transforming from a rag-tag group of “trailblazers” or “vanguards of imperialism” into the “brokers of empire,” and came to constitute a collective identity as an interest group in order to raise their voices in the making of imperial policies in Korea.<sup>336</sup> Varied as they were in areas and motivations, most of them succeeded to plant themselves as the local elite and were entangled with the colonial state as brokers of “petty commerce, foreign trade, construction, banking, journalism, and education.”<sup>337</sup> The foundation of the Kodŭng would have not possible had it not been for the conspicuous roles and transnational connections of these “men on the spot” who made pioneering forays into the commercial potential of the new visual technology.

The transnational trajectory of Japanese entrepreneurs who contributed to the founding of the Kodŭng shows a migration pattern that motivated profit-seeking individuals. The Kodŭng was founded by Kanehara Kinjō (金原金藏), an agency working for K Diamond Company, a small film distribution company that briefly operated in

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<sup>334</sup> While within the previous historiography on this earliest phase, the presence of the Japanese settlers within the local film entertainment scene has been deliberately omitted, there aroused a tendency to positively make sense of their contributions, while highlighting the ways in which Korean communities interacted, negotiated with and confronted them. See Yi Sun Jin (2011), Han Sangŏn (2011) and Dong Hoon Kim, *Eclipsed Cinema: The Film Culture of Colonial Korea* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

<sup>335</sup> See Yi Sun Jin (2011) and Han Sang Ŏn (2011).

<sup>336</sup> Uchida, 91.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 91.

Korea.<sup>338</sup> Through this company, he was purported to import films from another Japanese businessman, Watanabe (渡辺) who had been engaging with rubber farming in Thailand. It has been said that Watanabe introduced Japanese films to South Asia, including Thailand, having been impressed by the popularity of actuality films about the Russo-Japanese war that he had witnessed in Japan.<sup>339</sup> As Kanehara sold the ownership of the Kodūng to Nita Koichi (新田耕市) in 1913 who later became an entertainment business tycoon in colonial Korea as a general manager of the Nikkatsu (日活), Japan's biggest production company and theater chain's Korean branch, his reign did not last long.<sup>340</sup> However, the appearance of the Kodūng heralded the beginning of local cinema in Korea that screened not only film from America, France, Britain, and Russia but also Japanese films and the advent of film-related professionals such as projection engineers and *pyōnsa*, the interpreter and live performer for foreign movies.

In addition to serving as the first permanent cinema of Korea's urban entertainment markets, the spectator composition attending the Kodūng shows its unique mode of address that catered to multiethnic audiences. Although it began with the investment of a Japanese entrepreneur, the Kodūng was a de facto multiethnic theater that accommodated both Japanese and Korean audiences at the same time. Having Korean audiences on the first floor and Japanese on the second floor, it has been known that local Japanese

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<sup>338</sup> Han(2010), 81.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>340</sup> The Nikkatsu Corporation was the biggest entertainment company at that time that appeared as an amalgamate of several small production companies and theater chains in Japan including Yoshizawa Shōten, Yokota Shōkai, and M Pathé. Founded in 1912, the Nikkatsu was an acronym for Nippon Katsudō Shashin. Once it consolidated the distributional channels in Japan proper, they reached out to colonial Korea and Manchuria by building an integrating distributional network. Nita Koichi, the settler businessmen mentioned above was in charge of their Korean operation.

viewers occupied about half of the entire spectatorship at Kodŭng around 1911.<sup>341</sup> How can we account for this ethnically heterogeneous and concurrent spectatorship in colonial context? To better understand the Kodŭng's unique place as the first and exceptional occasion in which both Koreans and Japanese encountered each other as two distinctive public collectives in the same social space of a theater, it is necessary to learn about the longstanding residential segregation between Japanese settlers and Koreans that persisted throughout Kyōngsōng's urbanization.<sup>342</sup>

According to what scholars have dubbed the “dual structure characteristic of a colonial city,” Kyōngsōng, the largest colonial capital within the Japanese empire by the 1910s, had long been historically divided along ethnic lines.<sup>343</sup> Once Japanese migration began in the 1880s centering on treaty ports, Japanese settlers in Seoul were initially confined to a relatively impoverished small town called *chingogae* (meaning “muddy-town”) that was located at the foothills of the Nam Mountain and formerly inhabited by Chinese merchants during the Chosŏn period. While sprawling southward in a couple of decades, these Japanese settlers strived to turn “this strip of land into a mini-Tokyo” and build “Japantown” along with Seoul's growth moving outward to the suburbs.<sup>344</sup> Since then, with the stream of Ch'ōnggyech'ōn running through the heart of the city from east to west becoming a symbolic border, the Japanese enclave (South Village) had been

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<sup>341</sup> Just like other cinemas, the Kodŭng had varied seating options depending on the type of seats and proximity to the stage thus resulting in differences in ticket prices. With a total of 2,000 seats at full capacity, the first floor was composed of cheaper options of standing seats and shared benches, having a fancier Japanese-style tatami area on the second floor. See Yi Young-il, *Han'guk yōnghwasarūl wihan jūngŏnrok: Sōng Dongho, Lee Gyu Hwan and Ch'oe Gūmdong*. (Seoul, Korea: Sodo Publishing, 2003), 22.

<sup>342</sup> Yi (2011), 40.

<sup>343</sup> See Yōm Bok-gyu, Jun Uchida and Todd A. Henry

<sup>344</sup> Uchida, 71.

separated from the Korean Pukch'on (North Village). Chongno and Honmachi (本井) represented the liveliest commercial district for each ethnic quarter respectively. Consequently, this segregated residential landscape between the two "villages" was rather starkly demarcated by a number of distinctive markers including "street names, architectural styles, the distribution of modern amenities, and everyday cultural practices."<sup>345</sup>

Within each ethnic neighborhood, there also was segregation in the modes of consuming entertainment. For one, prior to the coming of the first indoor theaters in Korea, local settlers were known to have created their own entertainment complexes within their circumscribed territories.<sup>346</sup> In theaters replicating their homeland facilities, Japanese plays such as *nō*, *naniwabushi* storytelling, and *rakugo*, as well as *jōjuri* puppet shows, were frequently staged by Japanese troupes invited from Japan proper. In addition, the earliest motion pictures produced in Japan purportedly gained popularity among these immigrants precisely because they "transported the audience back to their cultural roots."<sup>347</sup> By contrast, the earliest theaters of the Korean Pukch'on area staged mostly Korean traditional performances, such as *p'ansori* and the dancing of *kisaeng*, as we have seen in the case of *Hyōmnyulsa*. For the first two decades of co-habitation, the ethnic demarcation was not something permeable, and the Koreans and Japanese were living as if they were "water and oil."<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>346</sup> Regarding the history of the entertainment quarters for the Japanese settlers, see Uchida Jun and Han. Especially, Han sees this as the origin of the purpose-built theatrical space in Korea.

<sup>347</sup> Uchida, 78.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 78.

Given this historical background of geographical and cultural segregations, the fact that the Kodŭng accommodated both Koreans and Japanese attests to two facts. For one, it exemplifies early cinema's universal appeal that could easily transcend the cultural and geographical disparities. As many studies have shown, silent and dialogue-free films could circulate globally to reach a wider audience beyond language barriers prior to the coming of sound films. Especially with regard to the American film industry's desire to hegemonically expand to the world market, focusing on D.W. Griffith's endeavor to stylistically formalize his film with global appeal, Miriam Hansen pointed out early cinematic consciousness to function as a universal language as a mythical hypothesis comparable to the story of Babel and Babylon in the bible.<sup>349</sup> No doubt, the mediating role of live performers such as *pyŏnsa* must have facilitated this process of localization. In this way, the built space of the Kodŭng became a virtual and actual contact zone between the two ethnicities and cultures who were otherwise separated. Through the new industry's strategy, the Kodŭng served as the infrastructure of consolidation in which the two ethnically differentiated audiences were integrated into a modern entertainment culture of consumption.

Before proceeding, however, I would like to conclude this section with an interesting vignette that describes how often movie theater were imbued with an illegitimate, unstable, and politically uproarious ambiance at the beginning of Japanese colonial rule. Under the colonial hierarchy, the ethnically mixed audience had the potential to cause ethnic conflict. According to an often-cited recollection of Yi Goo Young, a pioneering writer/critic /director/producer of early Korean cinema, a mass

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<sup>349</sup> Hansen (1991), 173-187.



disturbance outbroke during one of the screenings held at the Kodŭng in 1911, a year after Japan officially annexed Korea. Although further information is unavailable, we know that the night's program consisted of a mixture of short footage containing a showdown scene between a western boxer and a Japanese judo player. As a typical fight film genre, one of the dominant early cinematic attractions that included boxing exhibitions or sparring contests, the film would have aimed to pique spectators' empathic engagement. The fight scene in which a Japanese player was depicted, however, resonated with multi-ethnic audiences in the colonial context in an unexpected way and ended up fomenting a physical confrontation fought along ethnic lines. While Korean audiences cheered when the western boxer threw a punch at the Japanese athlete, Japanese audiences, by contrast, roared back in the opposite situation. According to his recollection, waves of booing and jeering burst out alternately throughout the screening. At last, the clash between the two floors intensified to the point of total collapse when Korean-style rubber shoes and Japanese *geta* sandals were thrown at each section. The inter-ethnic commotion couldn't be stopped until an attendant policeman on the premise was called forth to suppress it by blowing a whistle.<sup>350</sup> This is an episode pointing to the predicament of a movie theater in a multi-ethnic society under colonialism and the politically hierarchical structure of colonial spectatorship.

Contrary to the new industry's initial strategy to reach a wider audience, probably out of economic motivation to maximize the revenue, the ethnic inter-mixing at Kodŭng was a short-lived phenomenon. For the attempt of Japanese petty capitalists and early authorities to construct cinemas as a genuinely heterogeneous public space was soon

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<sup>350</sup> Yi Young-il (2003), 195.

frustrated by colonial practices of hierarchy and distinction that began to give shape to ethnically differentiated spectatorial practices in the next two decades. Having these two historical backgrounds in mind, this chapter continues to trace the evolution of movie theaters from an urban sociological perspective. As urbanization was a highly uneven process under colonialism and reflected colonial ideologies, I contend that the spatial arrangements of cinema theaters expressed the particular historical conditions that resulted from colonial rule. I look at certain topographic patterns in the spatial arrangement of the local cinema theaters in colonial Korea in its trajectory from desegregation to resegregation.

### **Infrastructure of Consolidation: The Unevenness of the Colonial City-Planning**

As Douglas Gomery suggested, having recourse to urban geography enables us to understand the actual audience composition who frequented the earliest movie venues as the location of movie theaters was determined in a way to maximize profit potential in “an efficient economic system.”<sup>351</sup> In a colonial context in which state policies do not always conform to the logic of capitalism, however, his hypothesis is only partially validated. It is because what enabled the emergence of the multiethnic theater like Kodūng was not only driven by commercial imperatives of a Japanese investor but also the result of the colonial city-planning.

During the first decade since the inception of motion-picture technology, the siting of earliest performance venues reflected a contingent interaction between the

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<sup>351</sup> Douglas Gomery, “Movie Audience, Urban Geography, and the History of the American Film,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 19 (January 1982), 23.

implementation of infrastructures with the institutionalization of cinematic culture. As discussed in Chapter One, it was not by coincidence that all the earliest indoor venues were in locations easily accessible by the newly-built streetcar lines. For example, the *Hyōmnyulsa* was centrally located “inside of the New Gate,” while the Seoul Electric Company’s warehouse venue was built next to their power plant in Tongdaemun (East Gate). Tansōngsa was also centrally located at Chongno, the main thoroughfare of the first streetcar line that traversed the city in the east-west direction. According to an advertisement at a local press, Frenchman Martin’s brick house was known to be standing “just outside of the Sōdaemun (West Gate)” next to “the newly built bridge.”<sup>352</sup> Considering that traditional performing arts such as *p’ansori*, mask dance, and other folk performances used to be staged under a makeshift tent on the street and, therefore, had been strictly prohibited within the city’s interiority and became a target of criticism for “obstructing people’s passage and defiling the appearance of the street,” the construction of the theater at the city center was a radical change marking the transition from the hierarchical dynastic spatial ordering to a more civic conception on public spaces.<sup>353</sup>

In this sense, the topological pattern in which these earliest permanent theaters were located displays how strategically theaters were located with the growth and development of urban areas within Kyōngsōng. Although the emergence of movie theaters was an undeniably urban phenomenon in Korea as well that should be explained in relation to the transformation of Kyōngsōng, it would be far-fetched if we simply compare these earliest theaters in Korea to the proliferation of downtown movie palaces

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<sup>352</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, April 24, 1907, May 29, 1907, June 19, 1907.

<sup>353</sup> Woo (2009), 246-252.

in the US as in Gomery's explanation. It is because urbanization or urban growth under colonialism has been a contested process.

From 1910 to 1940 since the appearance of the first permanent theater, the Kodūng, numerous movie theaters began to attract both Koreans and Japanese audiences to the time when the Korean Film Decree was enacted by which film industry in Korea was put under state control. During this time, however, the city-planning of Kyōngsōng underwent significant modifications under the auspices of the Government-General. Although it started with King Kojong's attempt to transform a long-time capital of a premodern dynasty into Hwangsōng (imperial capital) of the Great Han Empire, Japanese authorities strived to turn Kyōngsōng into Keijō, a colonial capital. In this process, what was at stake with the colonial city-planning was to achieve assimilation between colonizers and colonized, albeit spatially, even though it only brought about uneven developments between two ethnic enclaves. In the followings, I contend that the contested result of the colonial city-planning, in turn, had a decisive influence in determining the location of movie theaters that oscillated between desegregation and resegregation from an ethnic point of view. Before proceeding with examining this correlation, it is necessary to briefly refer to how the implementation of the colonial city-planning reconstructed Kyōngsōng from an imperial city to a colonial capital of Keijō. In doing so, I will also pay attention to the following aspects that can best characterize the consequences of the colonial city-planning on the development of movie theaters; While continuing to examine the transformations of the public spaces under colonialism, the ways in which infrastructural improvements were visually spectacularized in the colonial context will be discussed. Lastly, I will show the consequences of the first urban reform

plan of Keijō that resulted in uneven developments between two ethnic enclaves, contrary to their initial ambition to integrate them.

The Governor-General of Colonial Korea embarked on a new urban reform plan for constructing Keijō in 1912 through which they pursued both symbolic and material transformations of Kyōngsōng. On the one hand, it aimed to consolidate the city's fragmented and segmented parts into a whole and to amalgamate the city's two ethnically disparate populations.<sup>354</sup> To this end, the emphasis was mostly given to the extension and rearrangement of road infrastructures and to make the previously unconnected sectors within the city more systemically interconnected. Building on the existing roads laid during the Great Han Empire, the new arterial road system was superimposed along a north-south axis.<sup>355</sup> As seen in figure 14, the structural layout of the city was created as a grid system consisting of four east-west routes — with three more thoroughfares added parallel to Chongno (the long-time high street during the Chosŏn dynasty) on the horizontal axis and five north-south lines that vertically traversed them. In addition, three rotaries built at the intersections of diagonal roads were strategically located at “important power centers in the early colonial city.”<sup>356</sup> In this way, as the connections of

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<sup>354</sup> Regarding the effects of the first Kyongsong Urban Reform Project (京城府市區改正事業) issued in 1912, see Yŏm Bokgyu, *Sŏulŭi kiwŏn Kyŏngsŏng ŭi t'ansaeng: 1910-1945 tosigyehoegŭro pon kyŏngsŏng ŭi yŏksa* (The Origin of Seoul, the Birth of Kyōngsōng: 1910-1945 the History of Kyōngsōng seen through city-planning) (Seoul, Korea: Idea, 2016)

<sup>355</sup> According to Yŏm, implementing a grid system is a universal technique of modern city design manifest in many western cities in their path to modernization whose emblematic example is Paris under Haussmann's design in the nineteenth century. At the request of Napoleon who wanted a honeycombed city without obstruction for surveillance purpose, what Haussmann focused on was to systematically connect the two axis of the city – i.e. east-west and north-south, through widening and straightening arterial roads. See Yŏm, 17-24.

<sup>356</sup> Henry, 32. The first plaza was located in front of Kyōngbok Palace where Taihei Boulevard met Chongno and this plaza aimed to displace Tōksu Palace. The second plaza in Kōgane-machi bisecting the southern half of the city, aimed to placate the Japanese settler communities and their commercial interest to include developing Honmachi. And the third Tae'an-dong Plaza was put in the heart of the northern village to connect Kyōngbok Palace and Pagoda Park, the only civic

infrastructure became even denser, the entire city was to be integrated as an uninterrupted network.

On the other hand, the first urban reform plan proposed by the GJK also aimed to symbolically dismantle the spatial order of the Great Han Empire through “showcasing” Japanese modernity vis-à-vis the backwardness of the Korean royal house.<sup>357</sup> The first plan commenced in 1913 with an announcement that a new Governor-General building would be constructed on the grounds of *Kyōngbok Palace* and replace the former Residency-General’s facilities, which used to be located at the center of the Japanese town, Honmachi, during the protectorate period.<sup>358</sup> Moreover, as an attempt to “desacralize” the Korean royal house and to declare their state subordinate, the formerly enclosed grounds of the royal palaces were converted into public sites and used, albeit on an occasional basis, for various civic events, including industrial expositions.<sup>359</sup> For example, *Ch’anggyōng Palace*, one of the main castles that served as the royal residence for many generations, was turned into a civic park equipped with a royal museum, zoo, and garden; a western-style art museum was built at *Kyōng’un Palace*, which was symbolically renamed as *Tōksu Palace* after Kojong’s abdication in 1907; and *Kyōngbok Palace* was to be the new political center where the new GJK building would be erected.<sup>360</sup> Denouncing the “private domination of public space” by the royal court as evidence of civilizational backwardness, the GJK’s respatialization of Keijō strategically

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park in the northern village. The locations of these plazas reflected the emphasis pursued by the colonial urban design.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 28.

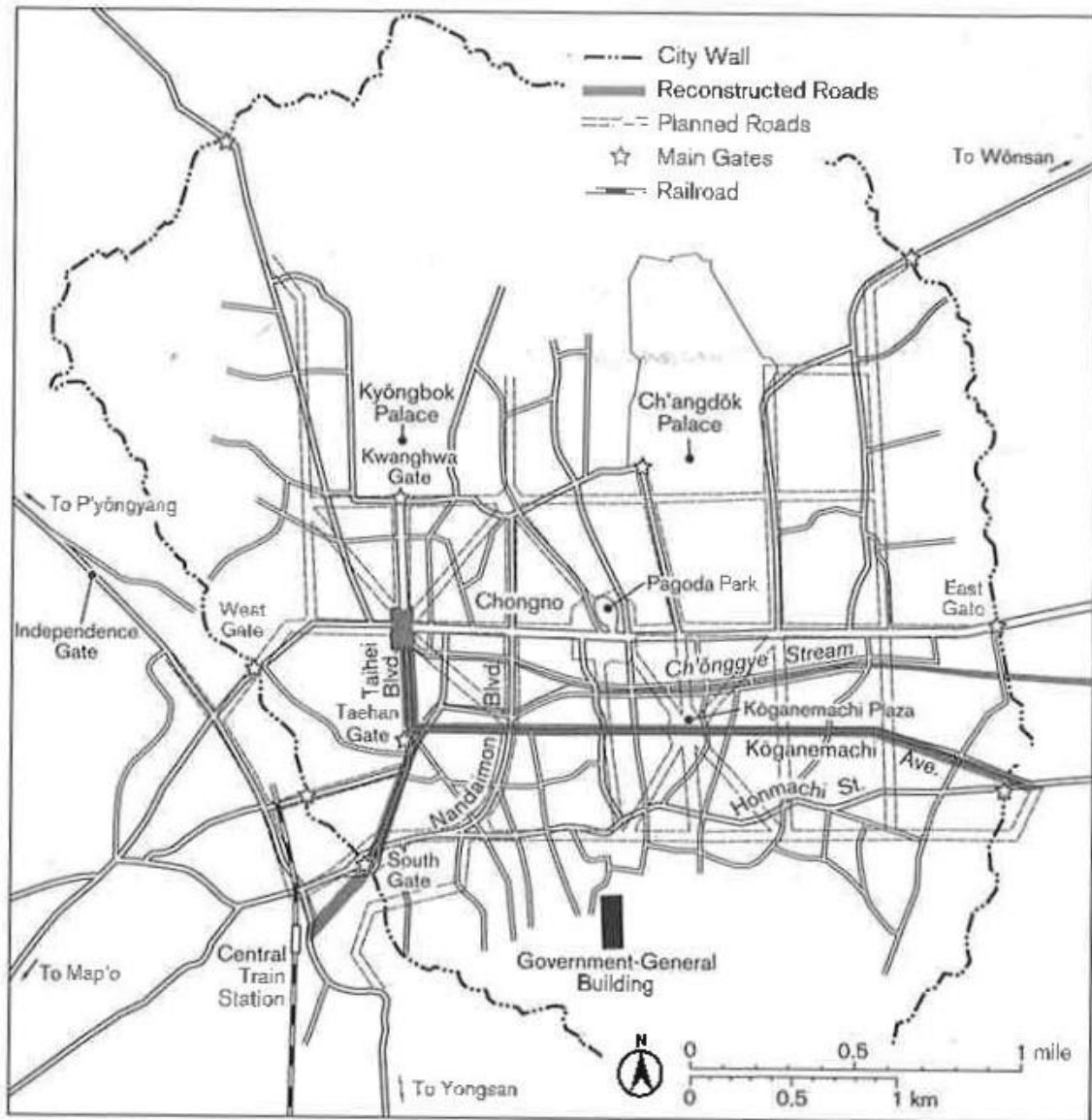
<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 29. The transformation of *Ch’anggyōng Palace* was based on the Meiji model of “modernizing” Ueno Park under imperial auspices.

promoted more “enlightened” uses of these public spaces as a way of showing off the public’s “civic morality (K. *kongdōksim*; J. *kōtokushin*).”<sup>361</sup> Thereafter, the first phase continued to 1915, the historic year when the Chosŏn Industrial Exhibition was to be held. Given the tremendous effort put into preparing this grand-scale event, it is no surprise that the GGK was eager to yield tangible results in improving the urban environment before that year.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>362</sup> Regarding the politics of representation deployed in Chosŏn Industrial Exhibition, see Hong Kal, *Aesthetic Constructions of Korean Nationalism: Spectacle, Politics and History* (New York: Routledge, 2011) and Se-mi Oh, “Consuming the Modern: The Everyday in Colonial Seoul, 1915-1937,” (Columbia University, Ph.D. dissertation, 2008). Having imitated world’s fairs in form and content, the Chosŏn Industrial Exhibition (*Chosŏnmulssan kongjinhoe*) was held in 1915 to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Japanese colonialism. As the first but most grand public event of such kind whose goal was to legitimate Japanese colonial rule through promoting its “civilizing mission,” the 1915 exhibition effectively utilized the visual strategies of representation. By displaying various forms of new spectacles such as monuments, western style exhibition halls, commodities, products of advanced industrialization, cutting-edge entertainments, and other signs of modernity, what was at stake with the mode of this exhibition was to show off “the grandeur of imperial power.” For this purpose, the state-of-the-art visual technologies including dioramas, photographs, posters, postcards and motion-pictures were utilized as a means of representing “progress” that Japan had achieved in Korea for the last five years of colonial rule. Among others, motion-pictures played a key role in attracting audiences to the extent that the number of daily visitors was determined depending on the special programming of the motion-picture hall (*Hwaldongsajingwan*). For example, what caught the audience attention most was the motion-picture that captured the flight of an aircraft circling overhead the exhibition venue, which must have been a rare spectacle to most of the attending guests.



**Figure 14. The Keijō Plan of 1912.** Source: Todd Henry, *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2016), 33.

Returning our attention back to a more practical level, the degree of material transformation brought to the city's surface was drastic, while benefiting from colonial infrastructural projects. As a newspaper editorial lamented, the snake-like uneven and



cramped streets were obstacles for a more “civilized” circulation of goods and people.<sup>363</sup> However, the rationalization of road formations that began with widening and straightening Keijō’s narrow and winding streets, in turn, promoted commerce, with various shops of international merchants mushrooming side by side on both sides of the newly established roads. Both colonial authorities and Korean enlightenment reformers were aware of the importance of the efficient road system that would run in all directions (*satong-paldal* 四通八達), as it can be seen as a gauge to measure the county’s degree of civilization.<sup>364</sup>

Among others, the creation of a grid system — the superimposing of north-south arterials, in particular — helped to realign the Korean neighborhood of the northern village with the settler community of the southern village, as part of the policy of assimilation (*dōka*) while challenging the dual structure of a colonial city.<sup>365</sup> On the surface, the planner’s attempt to spatially amalgamate the two ethnic enclaves seemed to bear fruit as the development of Hwanggŭmchŏng area (J. Kōganemachi), the most adjacent thoroughfare to the northern village, was prioritized. Whereas Japanese settlers whose home ground was located in Honmachi advanced as far as the Hwanggŭmchŏng area, the native Korean population spread southward. Eventually, the Hwanggŭmchŏng area became the proliferating middle zone where the ethnic penetration at the level of commerce and culture was first made possible, albeit momentarily.

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<sup>363</sup> According to Todd Henry, one editorial of *Maeil Sinbo* remarked that “[g]enerally speaking, roads have a direct connection with civilized transportations; ... if transit is convenient, import and export frequent, and the coming and going of people trouble-free, there will naturally be unlimited profits.” *Maeil Sinbo*, November 17, 1912. Recited from Henry, 40. Translations are his.

<sup>364</sup> See Todd Henry and Yŏm Bokgyu.

<sup>365</sup> Henry, 34.

Indeed, as seen in the case of Kodŭng, the location of permanent movie theaters that used to cater to a multiethnic audience was the result of this effort to spatially assimilate the two ethnic enclaves. Notably, a majority of movie theaters that were built from 1910 to 1919 with the investment of Japanese settlers were all concentrated around Hwangŭmjŏng area, one of the central east-west thoroughfares before the Korean targeting theaters such as Tansŏngsa, Umigwan, and Chosŏn Theater began to emerge in the northern village (*Pukch'on*).<sup>366</sup> Given that the Hwangŭmjŏng area was far from being a commercially vibrant district, one question arises why these earliest movie theaters were concentrated in Hwangŭmjŏng, rather than in Chongno nor in Honmachi.<sup>367</sup> Located right in between Chongno and Honmachi, representing each town's most bustling commercial centers, this has to do with the locational specificity of the Hwangŭmjŏng area as the middle zone that could connect and traverse the existing two urban centers.

Reminding the fact that the first local theaters in Korea appeared with the competition between Japanese settler businessmen and Korean entrepreneurs, movie theaters built with Japanese investment, including Kodŭng, must have been concentrated in this middle ground for obvious economic reasons, to guarantee maximum revenue. Given that it was the film industry's early phase in Korea, the actual market size would not have been large enough if its audience had to be divided. From a commercial

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<sup>366</sup> In addition to *Kudŭng* which was located at Hwangŭmjŏng 2-ga, *Hwangŭmgwan* was located at Hwangŭmjŏng 4-ga, while *Taejŏnggwan* was also adjacently located a block away from *Hwangŭmjŏn*.

<sup>367</sup> Yuh, 13. According to Yuh, compared to Honmachi where as many as 92 Japanese shops were thriving, only one store was in business at Hwangŭmjŏng area around 1910.

perspective, then, the middle zone was the most optimal location because of its topological convenience for addressing both ethnicities simultaneously.

At the same time, it can be explained more structurally in relation to the “dual structure characteristic” of a colonial city. Having been relatively neglected compared to the prosperity of Honmachi or Chongno, the significance of the locality of Hwangŭmjŏng lied in its liminality, as mentioned above. By the time of annexation, Honmachi and Chongno were the two poles of urban development and the dual structure was reinforced even more with the increased influx of Japanese migrants. As the ethnic polarization had become starker, however, there was a demand for a buffer zone between the two ethnic enclaves. According to Jun Uchida’s extensive study, Korea could be characterized as a “mixed-residence colony” with the porosity of ethnic intermingling, despite undeniable discriminations and the unevenness of colonial life.<sup>368</sup> Unlike European settler cities in Africa and elsewhere in which indigenous population was strictly barred from public facilities for fear of inter-ethnic contact, “the diffusion and sharing of sanitation facilities, parks, theaters and even Shinto shrines” were consciously encouraged in Korea by Japanese authorities as part of the policy of assimilation.<sup>369</sup> It is in this vein that Hwangŭmjŏng was strategically emphasized later as the area to be developed in the newly envisioned city planning after annexation.

For better governmentality of the colonial regime, Keijō, as a colonial capital, had to be connected as a communicative whole deviating from the traditional, fragmented, hierarchical spatial ordering of a dynastic capital. In this process, movie theaters, in its

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<sup>368</sup> Uchida, 82-87.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 87

incipient phase at least, functioned as material infrastructures that could contribute to the formation of new sorts of social spaces for ethnic assimilation.

Taking a closer look, however, reveals multi-layered dimensions implicated in the construction of colonial Keijō and the insurmountable difficulties of genuine assimilation. For the dichotomy or the dual structure of a colonial city could not be easily compromised. In 1917, a new bridge was erected connecting the “historic core” in the northern village to Yongsan, the newly booming town across the Han River. As the first bridge both for pedestrians and motor vehicles over the Han River, the completion of the bridge was boastfully publicized as the conclusion of the first phase of the colonial urban plan in the newspapers.<sup>370</sup> The opening ceremony was not only extravagant with the opening speech of the Governor-General, Hasegawa Yoshimichi, and other high-ranking officials but also festive with side various shows featuring both Japanese *geisha* and Korean *kisaeng* for the flocked crowd, which might have been staging a political gesture of assimilation.<sup>371</sup> Nevertheless, the unveiling of the new bridge foreshowed an important shift in the direction of the city’s development to come.

Thereafter, the second phase of Colonial Urban Reform (1919-1924) rather strategically focused on re-centering the southern village as part of showcasing the superiority of colonizers vis-à-vis the backwardness of the native town, Chongno.<sup>372</sup> Contrary to the colonialists’ initial intention to symbolically and materially assimilate the city’s ethnic divisions, the new spatial order gradually registered unevenness in distributing “modern amenities — electricity, tap water, gas, and sewers.”<sup>373</sup> Although

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<sup>370</sup> *Maeil Sinbo*, October 5, 1917 and October 7, 1917. Recited from Henry, 34.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-42.

<sup>373</sup> Uchida, 74.

the GGK building, as the symbol of political centered-ness, was to be erected in place of Kyōngbok Palace in the northern village, much effort was put into maintaining the colonial hierarchy among citizens at the same time. While the Japanese commercial district at Honmachi, as “Keijō’s Ginza,” boasted a “modernizing and cosmopolitan landscape” rife with “banks, companies, department stores, hotels, a post office, a chamber of commerce, and other multistory Western-style buildings of brick and stone,” the darkness and lack of commercial vigor and hygiene of Chongno, the traditional commercial center on the Korean side, presented a stark contrast.<sup>374</sup>

In this disproportionate process of respatializing the city, the settler community, most of whom were opportunistic profit-seekers, constituted the most powerful interest group and tried to exert a strong influence, even at the level of policymaking.<sup>375</sup> For example, from the outset, the expatriates petitioned the GGK to prioritize Honmachi and improvements in the southern village in the first phase of the urban plan.<sup>376</sup> Although their initial plea seems to have fallen flat, as the GGK decided to relocate its new administrative building to the northern village, and allotted considerable budget for symbolically rearranging the historic core into the political center of a colonial city, the GGK’s second urban reform can only be seen as a way to appease “the commercial interests of the expatriate communities.”<sup>377</sup> Indeed, during this second phase of colonial

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>375</sup> Regarding the ambivalent role of these Japanese settlers played out in the conception of colonial urban plan, see Jun Uchida, Chapter Two. According to her, settlers and Japanese state did not always harmonious especially with regard to the degree of assimilation. While local settlers depend on the GGK’s political and military protection, they also demanded privileges discriminated from Koreans and freedom from the GGK’s control. In her words, this partnership between settlers and state were too messy to be conflated as fellow colonizers.

<sup>376</sup> Henry, 30-32.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 33.

urban planning, the asymmetry in commerce, which had begun right after the Russo-Japanese war, was overtly consolidated to the extent that the capitalistic sprouts intrinsic to many areas of a colonial city, including entertainment businesses, were more systematically restrained and subordinated to the control of colonial rule. Although not unchallenged by the resistance from the colonized, this was a moment of “primitive accumulation” in which the colonial urban planning had conspired with this process both directly and indirectly. It is in this vein that cinema theaters, which had briefly served as contact zones for colonial encounters, came to be segregated again along ethnic lines and transformed into the epitome of the colonial public sphere, imbued with more chance of political disturbance.

### **Infrastructure of Segregation: Cinema as the Ethnic Public Space**

It was around 1913 when divided spectatorship reemerged respectively operated ethnically distinctive programs and practices.<sup>378</sup> On the one hand, theaters congregated in Honmachi in the Japanese quarters, including those in Hwangŭmchŏng, began to exclusively cater to Japanese audiences by hiring Japanese *benshi* and featuring mostly Japanese films. For example, with the transference of the ownership to Nitta Koichi, the owner of Taejŏnggwan (the first theater catering to Japanese audiences in Seoul), Kodŭngyŏnyegwan was transformed into the second Taejŏnggwan and began to solicit Japanese clientele.<sup>379</sup> By contrast, featuring Korean-speaking *pyŏnsa* and having mostly western films on the program, three historic cinema theaters — Umigwan (1912),

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<sup>378</sup> Yuh, 17. According to her, it was around 1913 when the advertisements for the Japanese cinemas such as *Kodŭng yeonyegwan*, *Hwanggeumgwan*, and *Daejŏnggwan* stopped appearing on *Maeil Sinbo*, the local press written in vernacular Korean.

<sup>379</sup> Han (2010), 73.

Tansöngsa (1918), and Chosŏn Theater (1922) — began to be clustered, one after another, in the Chongno area and to accommodate the growing demand of Korean patrons. Along the geographical division that separated the two villages physically and symbolically, movie theaters were divided again to serve as ethnically exclusive public spaces.



**Figure 15. Taejōnggwan.** Undated photography. *Source:* Seoul Museum of History

Contrary to the GGK's initial intent to spatially integrate the ethnic schism in the colonial city, not only was that complete assimilation never to be achieved during colonial rule, but colonists themselves fluctuated in determining the desirable degree of assimilation.<sup>380</sup> Thus, the great contradiction of colonial urban development — and colonial modernity in a broad sense — lies in this ambivalence between assimilation and differentiation. Given the intensification of ethnic discrimination in the colonial context, therefore, this kind of segregation may look like a logical consequence. In addition to the physical separation enacted through the locations of cinema theaters, a more immediate and practical reason for the formation of segregated film spectatorship was the emotional cleavage that resulted from linguistic and cultural barriers within a multi-ethnic empire, which couldn't be easily negotiated despite enhanced administrative endeavors for assimilation.

One such cleavage is apparent in the way that live narrators were employed. As a number of studies have demonstrated, the mediating role of live narrators in receiving and domesticating foreign films cannot be overemphasized. For the purposes of this chapter, I will confine my discussion of live performative narrators (*benshi* in Japanese or *pyŏnsa* in Korean) in relation to how their linguistic practices and affective modes of expression contributed to the formation of cinema theaters as politically performative spaces, while supplementing the instability of filmic texts.

Around 1907, the presence of *pyŏnsa* in presenting motion pictures was first observed in Korea.<sup>381</sup> As a mood-making moderator before and between the show, their

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<sup>380</sup> Regarding the vicissitudes of assimilation policy during the Japanese colonial rule, see Mark Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2009).

<sup>381</sup> Yi (2011), 38-39.



role as an interpreter for foreign films with subtitles was hardly a new phenomenon and their presence had become more and more conspicuous with the emergence of permanent theaters, prospering until the coming of sound films in the 30s.<sup>382</sup> As the length of silent films became longer, however, the role of performative narrators had become more and more integral to presenting the program. Around this time, their role was not confined to being a mediator who provided a short introduction before the show to facilitate audience understanding. Their increased involvement with the filmic texts tended to create new layers of meaning especially with regard to the consumption of foreign films.<sup>383</sup> As their status was figuratively compared to that of the third author — next to actors and directors — some of the *pyōnsa* gained enough popularity to get their names published in newspaper advertisements as part of theaters' promotional strategies.<sup>384</sup>

The types of language that the *pyōnsa* was supposed to use in the performance became a growing issue for both audiences and owner-operators of cinemas. For example, as a multi-ethnic theater catering to both Japanese and Korean, Kodūng had been known to hire both Japanese and Korean live narrators to provide two versions of verbal interpretation.<sup>385</sup> Before screening the actual motion-pictures, they alternated in

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<sup>382</sup> During the silent film era, the performance of *pyōnsa* consisted of preshow performance and simultaneous explanation to motion-pictures scenes. For the short introductory section during the pre-show, famous phrases from traditional novels were utilized with a tinge of oratory ambience. See Yuh, 32. According to her, *pyōnsa*'s exaggerate speeches and gestures in the preshow performances epitomized what Gunning has called the cinemas of attractions through creating a sense of suspense while preparing and making audiences expect the shock and attractions of the upcoming motion-picture screening.

<sup>383</sup> Yi (2011), 45-46.

<sup>384</sup> Yuh, 17. It was around 1913 that specific names of *pyōnsa* began to appear in *Maeil Sinbo*. Among others, Suh Sangho was the most famous at that time. As his nickname, "Dollar Fox" at *Umigwan* Theater suggests, he himself was a hot ticket who contributed to the popularization of cinematic culture during this early stage. He has been known to have added ridiculous dancing performance and provided improvised narrations, which succeeded to fetch the public interests.

<sup>385</sup> Yi (2008), 41.

presenting the introductory part. Once a Japanese *benshi* came to the stage from the right side of the screen and finished his part, a Korean *pyōnsa*, in turn, appeared from the right side of the screen and continued his version.<sup>386</sup> Among Korean *pyōnsa*, those capable of both languages presented greetings and introductions in Japanese during the preshow, which was followed by Korean translations.<sup>387</sup> However, the prolongation of the film's running time made it more and more difficult for *pyōnsa* to keep up with this consecutive interpretational practice while performing for a longer duration.

Precisely due to language barriers, the segregation of movie theaters can be seen as an inevitable result of economics. In this sense, looking at the way with which Umigwan, the first movie theater exclusively targeting a Korean audience, attempted to expand its market share while competing with the Japanese counterparts shows how the presence of *pyōnsa* was integral to the publicizing of the identity of the movie theater at that time and how language difference played a role in segregating film spectatorship. As the following newspaper article attests, Umiwan came up with an idea to strategically monopolize the Korean audience by bisecting the entire film market along ethnic lines. For this purpose, Umigwan made one of its competitors, the second Taejōnggwan, which had been rebuilt from the Kodūngyōnyegwan, turned back to a Japanese theater:

From the 15<sup>th</sup> and onwards, the second Taejōnggwan will be mainly catering to Japanese audiences without Korean *pyōnsa*. In that case, Umigwan would be the only movie theater that can accommodate Korean audiences in Kyōngsōng, which would bring it more profit. It is for this reason that the owner of the Umigwan made a deal with the proprietor of the second Taejōnggwan that he will pay 200 won a month at the cost of turning the second Taejōnggwan into a Japanese-exclusive facility. For sure, Umigwan can increase profit by monopolizing the market. However, we will have to see whether this would do good for audiences as well. If

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<sup>386</sup> Han (2010), 88.

<sup>387</sup> Yi (2011), 41. Suh Sangho, mentioned above, was one of these bilingual *pyōnsa* performers.

Umigwan began to pay less attention in bringing competitively good films without its competitor, it would be the loss of Kyōngsōng people.<sup>388</sup>

In this process, what is most notable is the abolition of the Korean *pyōnsa* system from the second *Taejōnggan*. As the mediation of the Korean narrator and his utilization of the Korean vernacular was an indispensable part of the formation of the Korean spectatorship, the linguistic barrier loomed larger than ever. Although it is interesting that the pundit in the newspaper expresses concerns regarding the harmful consequences of Umigwan's monopolization of Korean spectators, it is not the accessibility of theaters, nor locational convenience, that should be taken into consideration from an economic perspective. Reminding us of the relation between base and superstructure in the Marxist formulation, differences in language were a more fundamental cleavage superimposed upon the material divisions of the two colonial villages.

Another division that manifested on top of the segregated practice of movie-viewing was differences in taste. During the earliest phase, movie-viewings had been a more comprehensive experience that was not confined to the filmic text alone. However, in a decade, the scientific invention was gradually institutionalized as the most popular entertainment form, with the establishment of prototypes of the earliest film genres of certain conventions and repeated patterns. Now audiences began to pay attention to genre titles and develop their own taste and expectations in selecting the films they would like to watch. Notably, films began to be categorized by genre types, as seen in newspaper advertisements from around this time.<sup>389</sup> For the first time, genre names such as “Western tragedy (*taesō pigŭk*), melodramatic tragedy (*sinp'a pigŭk*), Japanese comedy (*ilbon*

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<sup>388</sup> *Maeil Sinbo* April 13, 1915.

<sup>389</sup> Yi (2011), 42.

*higŭk*), farce (*kolg'ye*), or historical drama (*sa'gŭk*)” appeared next to film titles.<sup>390</sup> This meant that differences in taste should be taken into consideration for movie theaters to be able to gain a competitive edge in the growing market. It comes as no wonder, then, that cultural disparities that had separated the two nations for such a long time were no less incommensurable than language difference. As a consequence, the ethnic distinction was immediately reflected in the constitution of weekly programs that could appeal to the respective ethnicities.<sup>391</sup> Whereas theaters at the Korean town programmed films imported from the West, particularly American serial films, as their main attraction, the Japanese theaters rather concentrated on presenting domestic films produced in their homeland.

On the one hand, the film preference of the Japanese expatriates was differentiated not only from that of native Koreans but also from those of Japan proper. As is apparent from the fact that the Japanese expatriate communities were operating their own entertainment facilities long before the annexation, what interested them was Japanese films through which they could be culturally connected to their homeland, rather than films from the west. Among films produced in Japan proper, the most welcomed themes were variations on traditional Japanese performance genres. The fact that most of the earliest Japanese migrants were from the lower classes, such as farmers, merchants, or wandering *ronin* (浪人), explains why the Japanese expatriates favored visual footage reenacting a variety of Japanese traditional performance genres, old-school dramas (舊劇), or historical dramas called *jidai geki*. Unlike audiences in Japan proper

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 42. Among categories advertised in the newspapers, *Taesŏ* refers to the West in classical Chinese.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 43.

who came to be rather inclined to more sophisticated movies made in the West, the expatriates' fixation on traditional Japanese themes is one significant characteristic of ethnically-segregated film spectatorship in colonial Korea.<sup>392</sup>

On the other hand, the most enduring genre beloved at the Korean cinemas was, beyond any doubt, action drama (*hwalgŭk*, 活劇), which had evolved from the prototypical genre of serial films into the longer form of feature films. Most of all, nothing can rival the popularity of the American films that began to hegemonically dominate the world's film market in the mid-1910s.<sup>393</sup> It was Umigwan that first established a reliable distributional channel for these foreign films through an exclusive contract with Universal beginning in 1916.<sup>394</sup> Thanks to this, Umigwan could gain a competitive edge in providing stable programs based on the monopolistic supply of Universal films.<sup>395</sup> Following that, major film distribution companies in the US, including Paramount, Fox, United Artists, Famous Players-Lasky, and First National, penetrated

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<sup>392</sup> Hoshino Yuko, "Kyōngsōnginŭi hyōngsōnggwa kŭndae yōnghwasanŭp chōngaeŭi sanggwansōng yōngu (A study on the Relation Between the Emergence of Kyōngsōng Citizens and the Development of Modern Film Industry)," (Seoul National University, Master's thesis, 2012), 46.

<sup>393</sup> The peculiar dominance of the American films in colonial Korea has garnered scholarly attention from many Korean film historians. See Yoo Sung Young, "Hwangsaeŭk singminji ŭi sōyang yōnghwa gwanramgwa sobi silchōn, 1934-1942 (Cultural practices of consuming foreign films in war-time colonial Korea, 1934-1942)," *Ōllon'gwa sahŭe* 13-2 (2005) and Research Group Cinema Babel eds., *Chosōn yōnghwa wa hariudu (Chosōn Cinema and Hollywood)* (Seoul: Korea, Somyōng Publishing, 2014).

<sup>394</sup> For Umigwan's contract with the Universal's direct undertaking branch in Tokyo, see Han Sang Ōn, "1910 nyōndae chungban chosōnesō yunibōsōl yōnghwa e gwanhan yōngu (The Universal Films in Korea During the mid-1910s)," *Cine Forum* no. 23 (2016), 333-362.

<sup>395</sup> Among others, the most popular serial film that had been repeated for screening was *The Broken Coin* directed by Francis Ford in 1915. For the tremendous popularity of *The Broken Coin*, see Baek Mun Im, "Kamsangŭi sidae, chosōn ŭi miguk yōnsok yōnghwa (The American Serial Films in Colonial Korea and The Age of Mere Viewing)," in *Chosōn yōnghwawa hariudu (Chosōn Cinema and Hollywood)* (Seoul, Korea: Somyōng Publishing, 2014).

into the film market in colonial Korea through various types of contract.<sup>396</sup> Either through proxy Japanese agencies or direct distribution, the Korean cinemas in colonial Korea came to be incorporated within the global network of Hollywood's distribution system. The difference in repertoires involved in constituting peculiar programs palatable to each ethnicity became even starker in the 20s, to the extent that the majority of the American films circulating at that time were screened at one of the three Korean cinemas, while Japanese films were rarely screened. And this continued until the new film regulations (1934) that stipulated the mandatory screening ratio for domestic films as a way of restraining the dominance of foreign movies.<sup>397</sup> Particularly if the numerous traveling screenings to rural areas are counted, the popularity of the American movies among Koreans was quite a remarkable phenomenon that needs further scrutiny.<sup>398</sup>

With this segregated practice of film spectatorship, the Korean cinemas served as a single *de facto* ethnic space allowing for colonial Koreans to lawfully gather in an ethnically homogeneous space as an imaginary collectivity. As Yi Sŭng-hŭi, a Korean film scholar, suggests, the movie theaters targeting Koreans constituted an ambivalent

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<sup>396</sup> For the discussion of the distributional enterprise for foreign films during the 1920s, see Yi Ho Gyŏl, "Singminji chosŏn ūi oe'guk yŏnghwa: 1920nyŏndae kyŏngsŏngŭi chosŏnin yŏnghwagwanaesŏui oehwa sangyŏng (Foreign Movies in Colonial Korea: The Exhibition of Foreign Movies at Kyŏngsŏng's Korean Theater During the 1920s)," in *Taedomunhwa yŏngu* 72 (2010), 77-114.

<sup>397</sup> The Film Regulations enacted in 1934 has been regarded as the root of the screen quota system through which the importation and screening of foreign films were regulated in favor of domestic (a.k.a. Japanese) films. Given that theaters targeting at Korean audiences were screening mostly foreign films, the regulation was technically considered as a control over Korean nascent film enterprise. Regarding the 1934 Film regulation, see Yi Hwa Jin, "Singmingjigi yŏnghwa kŏmnyŏl ūi chŏngaewa chihyang (The Development of Orientation of Film Censorship during the colonial period)," in *Han'guk munhak yŏngu* 35 (2008) and Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim (2011)

<sup>398</sup> In this regard, Yoo Sun-yŏng's analysis relating this superiority of the American cinema in colonial Korea to the cultural practice of resistance, albeit passive, of the colonial subjects in Korea is worth of noting. And Baek Mun Im suggests reading this from a more economic perspective.

public sphere in the colonial context.<sup>399</sup> On the one hand, these theaters were an affective space for Koreans in which their colonial identity could be ironically recognized. The ambivalence precisely lied in the presence of the police officer, which put the cultural practice of movie viewing under constant surveillance by the colonial power, despite the illusions and exotic fantasies projected onto the screen. Like the earlier disturbance that occurred at Kodŭngyŏnyegwan, which brought about the incidental confrontation between the two disparate audiences, movie theaters in the Korean quarter were places imbued with political performativity that could readily lead to politically rebellious activities. It is no wonder that the emotional cleavages would have been even more reinforced with the growth of anti-Japanese sentiments among Koreans.<sup>400</sup> Agitated by the oratorical gestures of the *pyŏn*sa's performance or responding acutely to the political issues of the day, the crowds at the movie theaters could have potentially been interpellated into a political mass at any time. For this reason, apart from imposing of censorship on filmic texts, the spatiality of movie theaters in the Korean quarter became the target of constant supervision, in a more systemized regulatory system of the colonial administration. For example, certain movie screenings had to be canceled on specific

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<sup>399</sup> Yi Sŭng-hŭi, "Chosŏn kŭkjang ŭi sŭk'aendŭl kwa kŭkjangŭi chŏngch'i kyŏngjehak (Scandals at Chosŏn theaters and political economy of movie theater)," in *Taedongmunhwa yŏngu* 72 (2010), 115-156.

<sup>400</sup> For example, an event that took place at a province of Pyŏngnam in which actuality films about the Great Kantō Earthquake were screened had to be cancelled in the middle of the event due to possibilities of mass uprisings. It had been said that Korea audiences burst into cheers while Japanese crowds remained sympathetic. See Pak Hye Young, "1920nyŏndae singminji kŭndaesŏnggwa chosŏn yŏnghwa: Sunjong hwangje insansŭpui wa Arirang ŭl chungsim ŭro (Colonial Modernity in Korea in the 1920s and Chosŏn Cinema: Focusing on Funeral Procession for Emperor Sunjong and Arirang)" (Korea National University of Arts, Korea: Master's thesis, 2013), 58.

occasions because of the potentiality of mass protests, such as celebrations of the March First Movement, May Day, or Children's Day, etc.<sup>401</sup>

Cinematic spaces in colonial Seoul had been conditioned in accordance with the emergence of the mass public and the ambivalent executions of the colonial urban planning; as both symbolic and material infrastructure of enlightenment and entertainment, they could contribute not only to consolidation but also to segregation. Fluctuating between ethnic assimilation and segregation, movie theaters in colonial Korea were an ambivalent public sphere and functioned not only as a space of cultural consumption but also as a political space for colonial subjects. In Miriam Hansen's explanation linking the emergence of film spectatorship during the American silent film era to the making of public-sphere, what she focused on was the group of immigrant workers and cinema-viewing as their cultural practice. In a similar fashion, what was at stake with the turning of cinematic space into a colonial public sphere during its formative days was ethnic hierarchies that demarcated the formation of colonial spectatorship from that of colonizers. While the first two decades of cinematic history on the earliest development of movie theaters in Korea attest to the complicity of the coming of urban modernity in colonial Korea in general and the ethnically embedded origin of film culture, the ensuing decade in which indigenous film industry in colonial Korea had begun to take shape and was specialized into its subfields of production, distribution and exhibition is marked by an even more intensified tendency of ethnic segregation, which needs a separate scrutiny.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Pak, 52.

<sup>402</sup> For the formation of ethnically segregated film spectatorship and its distinct practices between Japanese settler community and Korean audiences later in the 1930s, see Dong Hoon Kim.



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*Taehan Maeil Sinbo*  
*Maeil Sinbo*  
*Mansebo*  
*Cheguk Sinmun*  
*Sonyŏn*  
*Ch'ŏngch'un*  
*Tonga Ilbo*  
*Byŏlgŏngon*

#### Films

*Seoul, the Capital of Korea* (E. Burton Holmes, circa 1901)  
*Korea* (Roy Chapman Andrews, 1912)